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ABSTRACT

Case studies of two small rural schools in Western Australia were conducted to examine the contention that neglect of distinctive economic, social and demographic environments of schools in rural areas has led to a tendency for rural schools to become carbon copies of urban schools, and thus to a mismatch between educational provision and the needs and situations of rural communities. Demographic and socioeconomic information was collected from Australian Bureau of Statistics 1976 Census Data and by interviews with shire clerks of the areas; descriptions of school-community interaction were developed from interviews with community members and educational staff. Community members in Etanding "own" and take responsibility for their one-teacher primary school, which provides education to 21 children from the farming community: all participate in its activities, and enhance educational quality. At Dumbleyung, a district high school including pre-primary through tenth grade instruction, community members were characterized by diversity in degree of involvement, interest, and concern shown in school affairs, and the school was seen as running more independently of the community, with the community a valuable resource and a help in moulding school policy. Major strengths of both schools were their smallness, close community contact, good facilities and competent staff. (JD)

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STUDIES IN RURAL EDUCATION NO. 4

RURAL SCHOOLS WITHIN THEIR COMMUNITIES

S.K. Brown
J.R. Maisey

RESEARCH BRANCH

EDUCATION DEPARTMENT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

August, 1980

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FOREWORD

Recently, the Western Australian Education Department was the Australian representative in an international project organized under the auspices of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). The project generated a number of interesting conclusions. One such conclusion, reached after examination of rural education in twelve OECD countries, was that educators may have unduly neglected the distinctive economic, social and demographic environments of schools in rural areas. It was the contention that rural schools had tended to become carbon copies of urban schools, and that a mismatch had occurred between educational provision and the needs and situations of rural communities.

To examine some aspects of this contention in Western Australia, the research project which is reported here was instituted. This report constitutes a description of two small rural schools which are situated in the wheatbelt areas of Western Australia, and the interaction of each with its community. The first school is a one-teacher school situated at Ejanding. Its 21 pupils range in age from four years to twelve years, and live on farms scattered around the isolated schoolhouse. The second school is a district high school, situated in the township of Dumbleyung. It caters for children whose ages range from four to fifteen.

In essence, the report provides an understanding of how these two communities view their school, and of how the schools fit into the contours of their economic, demographic and social environment. It is also an exploration of the educational and social issues which arise from this understanding.

It is not to be expected that conclusions reached from a study of only two schools will be universally relevant. Nor is it to be expected that the views expressed in this report are necessarily held by all community members or educators. However, case studies are excellent vehicles for provoking interest and generating insights into complex issues. Readers of case studies must use the insights, together with their own experiences and imagination, to determine what these studies say about other schools in other communities.

I would like to express my appreciation to both to school staff and community members at Ejanding and Dumbleyung for their assistance throughout this project. Without their co-operation and enthusiasm, the value of these two case studies would be considerably diminished. I would also like to thank Ms Sandra Brown, Mr Richard Maisey and other members of the Research Branch who undertook the study of the two schools.

D. Mossenson

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

This report describes two rural schools and their communities. The first school is a one-teacher primary school located in the small wheatbelt settlement of Ejanding. This school provides education to 21 children who belong to a surrounding farming community. The second school, located in the wheatbelt town of Dumbleyung, provides educational services for the entire compulsory schooling of its students. The school children, aged from four to fifteen years, live either in the township itself, or on farms in the surrounding countryside.

A description of these two schools, presented in the second chapter of this report, delineates the importance of the school and community to each other. From this description it is evident that each school is important to its community for many reasons other than its basic educational function. Both schools help promote and maintain community structure and identity, and are an integral part of the economic patterns in the community. The richness and quality of both the educational experience and community well-being is dependent upon this symbiotic school-community relationship.

The third chapter is devoted to a discussion of how well the practices and policies of the schools, and of the Education Department, fit the characteristics and needs of the two communities. This discussion is based on the views expressed by community members and school staff regarding the strengths and weaknesses of the schools. Aspects of educational policies and practices which accord particularly well with their community's needs, as well as those which result in discord between the school and community needs and characteristics are examined.

The fourth chapter summarizes the findings presented in the two previous chapters. Also, in the context of current literature on the subject, issues are discussed which are at the heart of rural education debates today, and have implications for educational authorities. These include the dilemma of local versus broader society relevance in curriculum, costs of rural schooling, the meaning of 'rural disadvantage', and the implications of dwindling enrolments in rural schools. This chapter concludes by indicating directions for educational decision-makers in planning for rural schools.

The Ejanding and Dumbleyung schools were chosen for study because they highlight particular issues of interest to rural educators in Western Australia. The organizational patterns of the two schools are characteristic of many schools dotted around the rural areas of Western Australia. There are 29 other schools in the Western Australian Education Department which, like Ejanding, have only one full-time teacher to teach a small group of children up to the end of their seventh school year. Dumbleyung is one of more than fifty district high schools, where children from the age of four can attend school until their tenth or, in some cases, twelfth year of schooling. Both schools are small and are facing the problems associated with gradually falling enrolments. Both schools bus students each day from the surrounding countryside. In both communities, children must board away from home to continue their education past that provided by the local school.

It was also important for the purposes of this study to choose good rural schools, since it was suspected that it would be from good schools that most could be learned about how schools accord with their communities. Both Dumbleyung and Ejanding were recommended by senior Education Department officers as being excellent schools. On a more pragmatic level, both schools are within reasonable driving distance of Perth, and in both schools the senior staff member was not a newcomer to the school.

Information relating to the social, demographic and economic features of the communities was collected from the Australian Bureau of Statistics 1976 Census Data. This statistical viewpoint of community characteristics was supplemented by interviews with the shire clerks of the two areas.

A description of school-community interaction was developed using interviews, each of half to two hours' duration, with a wide variety of people in each community. At Ejanding, parents from each of the 13 families with children at the school were interviewed, and in all but two cases, both parents were present. In addition, 18 Ejanding residents were interviewed, including parents of past and future students of the school, and interested community members. This number represents a substantial proportion of the total district population. In addition to community members, the three staff members at Ejanding school, and four staff from the Regional Education Office (who have responsibilities relating to Ejanding school) were interviewed. A further 12 people from Head Office branches of the Education Department were interviewed regarding Education Department practice and policy.

At Dumbelyung, interviews were conducted with parents from 23 of the school's 80 families, all secondary students (in class groups), all the teaching staff, many of the support staff and three Regional Education Office staff. Prominent community leaders and businessmen were interviewed to provide viewpoints from a cross-section of the Dumbelyung community. A total of 75 people were involved in this case study.

A most important task facing researchers in this study was to establish good relations and credibility with the people involved in the research project. Initial contacts with school and regional personnel were made through the Superintendent of Research. Contacts with community members were made in the company of the principal of the school or the President of the P & C Association. Before the interviews began, the researchers made several visits to the schools and their communities. Principals, groups of staff and interested community members were told about the project's aims and what involvement in it would mean to them. With each group, detailed negotiations were undertaken. In some cases this resulted in planning changes in the nature of information collected, or its means of collection. After these meetings, a formal commitment to the project was requested of people to be involved.

Both during the data-collection phase, and after initial drafts of the report were written, feedback was sought from many people regarding the relevance, accuracy and importance of the findings. Consequently, the authors are confident that this report accurately reflects the point of view of the educators and community members associated with each school.

2.0 EACH SCHOOL IN ITS COMMUNITY

This chapter provides a description of two schools and their communities. The close relationship between the schools and their respective communities is analysed. A picture is drawn of the ways in which the community utilizes its school for various purposes, both educational and otherwise. Similarly, how the school utilizes community resources and characteristics to enhance the quality of its educational function is described. The descriptions show how the well-being of the school and its community are inextricably interwoven.

2.1 Ejanding school and its community

2.1.1 Ejanding community

Ejanding is situated on the railway line to Kalannie some 23 kilometres north of Dowerin townsite and within the Shire of Dowerin. It is in the heart of the Western Australian wheatbelt. Wheat and sheep farms form the economic basis of a prosperous community.

The people of the area are predominantly of European origin, most being at least second generation Australians, with English as their only language. The few people in the area born overseas originate from the United Kingdom, Eire or New Zealand and most have been residents of Australia for 25 years or more. Most of the residents in the area are self-employed farmers, although there are a few working as share-farmers or 'married couples' employed by local farmers.

The 'town' of Ejanding, which is diagrammatically represented in Figure 1, consists of six buildings and a large wheat silo. The teacher's house is clustered with the shop and the rail-siding. A communal shearing-shed is close by. The school is half a kilometre away and is separated from the community hall by another half kilometre of bush. The families whose children attend the school live on farms spread over an area of about 1 000 square kilometres, with homesteads four or five kilometres apart.

Within a 50-kilometre radius of Ejanding are five larger town centres. Families at Ejanding use these centres to varying extents for different purposes. Most families visit their district centre, Dowerin, for its sporting, shopping and social facilities, although the townships of Manmaning, Cadoux, Wyalkatchem and Koorda are also utilized.



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Considering the lack of facilities at Ejanding, the use of many other centres by people in the area, and the lack of any natural boundaries, it is pertinent to ask if there is a 'community' to which Ejanding school belongs. Simple though this question might seem, in some senses it is problematic.

What is a community? Some consider a community to involve a district, a geographically bounded cluster of people living together with some degree of common interest. Others require this concept to include a practical aspect such that people within a community have their basic needs served by the same institutions, and consequently bonds are created between them. Still further understandings maintain that an aggregation of people is not a community unless people feel that they belong to the community (Musgrave, 1973, p.168).

When Ejanding is considered in a geographic frame of reference, it is clearly not a community, since the families on farms are geographically isolated from each other. From a practical point of view, Ejanding still does not qualify as a community. While there is a degree of commonality in membership of the various groups in Ejanding, such as Parents and Citizens and Farmers' Union groups, many functions are served by institutions outside Ejanding. People may shop in Dowerin, play sport at Cadoux or conduct business at Wyalkatchem. Clearly in the geographic sense, and in the practical sense, Ejanding is not a community.

However, if one accepts the contention that the essence of community is a sense of common bond, the sharing of identity coupled with the acknowledgement of rights and obligations¹, then Ejanding can be considered as a community. Strong community identity is a striking characteristic of this small locality. Semi-jokingly, they say that Dowerin is really a suburb of Ejanding and that Ejanding is the centre of the earth.

¹ The question of just what sections of the world belong to such a community raises problems, both conceptually and methodologically. Consequently, in the context of this report, a community has been conceptualized as a network of interactions rather than as a bounded static entity. The community can be thought of as a group of people who interact together and have a sense of common membership. The community can be identified by charting contacts between people, without the problems of identifying boundaries and charting functional relationships. This conceptualization has considerable utility in studying the Ejanding school and its community. The methodological considerations implicit in this are expanded in Appendix 1.

A succinct expression of this community identity was uttered by one Ejanding citizen who explained the allegiance to Ejanding as arising from the feeling that:

Ejanding is our dung-hill.

This community identity is deeper than these light-hearted comments may indicate. Community vitality is evident. The expectations and responsibilities which underlie the interactions between community members are distinctive. There is, for instance, a consensus that active commitment to Ejanding is necessary if the community is to remain viable. Community facilities such as the hall depend on co-operative maintenance and funding efforts. The community is very small, so that the people at Ejanding live in the social reality that if they don't do anything, there is no one else who will. Hence, it is expected that everyone will co-operatively encourage, maintain and participate in community activities, including the school.

I have been much more involved in the school since moving to Ejanding. The smallness seems to breed an expectation of involvement. (A parent)

it is this sense of belonging, of sharing a common identity, coupled with acknowledged rights and responsibilities, that makes it sensible to talk about the Ejanding community.

2.1.2 Ejanding school

Ejanding is a Class IV primary school with 21 pupils. It accepts children from the age of four in the pre-primary, until they complete their primary schooling at about 12 years. After this, most children have to live away from home to attend secondary school, although a few are bussed to nearby district high schools.

The school buildings constitute one older-style school-room, and one new prefabricated classroom. A small playground and a nearby oval have been hewn from the surrounding low scrub, in which the children frequently play.

The staff at Ejanding consists of the Teacher-in-Charge, a part-time music specialist and one ancillary staff member who is employed half-time as a pre-primary aide, five days per term as a clerk-typist primary, and five days per year as a clerk-typist (pre-primary). Both these part-time staff members are drawn from the local community.

Despite its geographic separation from other structures, the 'school' can not be considered in isolation from the Education Department support and administrative structures. Perth-based and regional support staff, such as superintendents and advisory teachers, have professional contact with the school. Similarly, the staff of other schools in the district have a significant role in the activities of Ejanding school. This network of educational services, facilities and contacts should also be considered as part of the 'school' at Ejanding.

2.1.3 The role of the school in the community

In a community with few physical structures and institutions, those that do exist play a significant role in maintaining the community. Not least is the part played by the school.

(1) The school's educational role

Ejanding community members have clear ideas about what they expect from their school. This is illustrated by their descriptions of what they believe are the desired attributes of a good school. Ejanding people claim that their school should:

- (a) Provide a basic education in literacy and numeracy so that students are prepared academically for high school.
- (b) Provide an opportunity for children to interact with other children to extend their social and intellectual horizons. This is seen by some people as necessary preparation for secondary school and by others as a means of countering parochial attitudes that can develop.
- (c) Provide a range of activities, that include such areas as drama, art, manual arts and music. These facilities should be readily available to those who have special ability in these areas.
- (d) Provide a good supply of equipment and comfortable working conditions for both the teacher and students.
- (e) Not place too much pressure on children to achieve early in schooling.
- (f) Provide remedial and specialist help, from other than the full-time school staff.

- (g) Provide a variety of teachers over a period of time. It is seen as desirable that teachers change every two years to enable the children to have experience with three or four teachers during their primary education.
- (h) Provide enough competitive stimulus to encourage achievement in both academic and non-academic areas.

It is interesting that most Ejanding people do not see their primary school as having the major role in teaching the children about the broader Australian community. Rather, they see the school as a passport to the secondary school, where they will learn these things.

There is strong support for the school by Ejanding community members.

We could send our children to Cadoux. They were given the choice and chose Ejanding. The school is small and that gives the children, especially shy ones, the opportunity to develop confidence. There is a strong togetherness feeling at Ejanding. (A parent)

This support can be traced both to the congruence between what people in this community expect from a school and what it provides, and to the perceived advantages of this type of school. In fact, most people in the Ejanding community expressed satisfaction with the education provided at present. Community members constantly cited the fact that students do well when they go away to high school as an indication that the level of academic achievement at their school is most satisfactory.

The organization of the educational provision at Ejanding is also strongly supported. Ejanding school offers pre-primary and primary education (i.e., it is a K-7 school). To continue their education past Year 7, students must live away from home. With two exceptions, the Ejanding people expressed satisfaction with having their children attend a local primary school and then a more distant boarding-school for secondary education. Living away from home in a larger centre is seen as a way of both broadening the children's intellectual and social horizons, and as a means of providing for the social and recreational needs of young adolescents. This applied equally for

boys who are expected to return to the family farm, and to boys and girls who are expected to make a life outside the district. Many expressed sorrow at the cost to family life that sending children away incurs, but saw no real alternative. They felt, regardless of educational considerations, that small communities are particularly unable to cater for the needs of adolescents.

*Our community doesn't offer enough to 14- and 16-year-olds - there are not enough other kids to allow for organization of activities. The social/sport organization is for adults.
(A parent)*

A minority of people see greater value in the district high school organization with its continuity from Year 1 to Year 10, and would prefer to have their children live away from home only for the last two years of secondary education. However, most parents perceive the break and change in school at the end of Year 7 to be more advantageous than a break at the end of Year 10. This is one of the factors in the strong support of the community for their school rather than for the nearby district high school.

This pattern of schooling is consistent with the child-raising pattern favoured in this community. The pattern is one of support and nurture at a young age, followed by gradual preparations, at about 10 or 11 years of age, for going away from home when they are about 13 years old. This severance of child from family is seen as the necessary breaking of dependence which is part of growing up in Ejanding.

(2) The school as a nucleus of community identity

Although Ejanding people really do consider themselves as Ejandingites, the Ejanding community is a delicate entity. Outward signs of its cohesion are few. The only signs of activity are the monthly church meetings attended by families, the slow trade at the shop, the occasional tennis game, and business-oriented ventures such as Farmers' Union meetings and seasonal shearing and silo work. To the visitor to Ejanding, it seems that the school is the only regularly attended community structure. It is not surprising therefore to find that the school plays a significant part in promoting social and community cohesion, and acts as a focal point and as a meeting-place for community members. The school is central to social interaction and communication. Perhaps more importantly, the school is a symbol to the community of its own vitality and identity.

The school is the focus of many of the events in the Ejanding social calendar. One such event is the annual school Christmas concert. This is attended by a wide variety of people, and, as is usual in country towns, people from other centres are invited, especially relatives and friends. At this concert, the Ejanding school children perform their well-rehearsed items, prizes are awarded to each child who is leaving the school, and general Christmas spirit prevails.

*You get invited to the concert, even if you are not a parent. Parents ring around to get a crowd.
(A parent)*

Somewhat less widely attended, but nonetheless significant as social events, are school outings such as the annual school picnic. At this event, most mothers and fathers attend for a day of art, sport and social togetherness. 'Busybees' and sports carnivals are another opportunity for Parents and Citizens' and others to socialize. A most regular social event for the Ejanding school community is the Parents and Citizens' meeting. Even a poorly attended meeting of the Parents and Citizens' Association would have 70 per cent of the families represented.

To many Ejandingites, interest in the school is a family tradition. Community members take much pride in its appearance, and in the excellence of its resources and facilities. They are concerned with how it compares with schools in other communities. They believe that if the school is closed, then the community would 'die', and be absorbed into the communities of larger surrounding towns.

It is probably the community's realization of the school's importance in this regard which contributes to, and partly explains, the broad base of community interest in the school. Parents of children at the school, concerned school-community members, parents of ex-students and future students, and ex-students themselves - all are informed about and involved in school issues and activities.

(3) The school as a socializing agent

For a community group with a strong identity, it is important to develop in children an allegiance to that community. Recognition of this need is evident at Ejanding. In the eyes of the Ejanding community members, the school has a crucial part to play in fostering the Ejanding community spirit and developing in their children a sense of belonging. Thus, community members see as one advantage of maintaining

their small schools that children get to know most of the others in the district. They develop a sense of community and co-operation. The close relationship between the school and community enables the school to reinforce community norms, values and expectations, and develops in the children a strong sense of their identity as Ejanding community members.

(4) The school in the economic community

Most Ejanding community members shop for most goods at nearby larger centres. A number of farmers have economic interests outside the community. However, a small proportion of business goes through the local Ejanding store. The owners of the store also operate the school bus, the school banking and the Ejanding post office. The school plays a key role in the maintenance of this structure in a number of ways.

We support the store a lot. It's an asset to the district and the people are part of this community. But, if there was no school we would probably shop in Dowerin because it would be more convenient.
(A parent)

Members of Ejanding community have observed with dismay that the closure of other small schools in the district has resulted in the closure of nearby commercial enterprises. When families begin to frequent larger centres, as they do when their children attend the school there, they tend to patronize shops near the school. Consequently, trade in the smaller area tends to decrease. The importance to the community of both the school and the shop lies not only in the economic flow of buying and selling but also in the community spirit or feeling of cohesiveness engendered by their presence. It is this cohesiveness, together with the proximity of the shop to the school, which is fundamental to people's patronage of the Ejanding store. Indeed, for some people this feeling of responsibility for the community is the only reason they have for shopping at the store.

The school also provides direct support for the economic activity in the area in a number of ways. Perhaps the most significant way is the contribution the school bus contract makes to the viability of the shop-fuel agency and its associated farm and merchandise depot. The shop is used largely to supply post, paper and emergency smallgoods. The drum-and-merchandise depot at the store are more frequently used. However, it is the joint operation of these enterprises with the school bus contract which ensures the financial viability of the enterprise.

The school also employs local people from the community. It employs a clerical assistant/pre-primary aide, and a part-time teacher.

The belief that the school plays an important part in the economic community is supported by statements made by a local government official in the area. He observed that the role of a small school in a community is critical:

When they are closed (as a number in this district have done) the community tends to lose ownership of their children. In some cases, closure of a school is one factor in the trend for families to sell farms, because the kids don't come back, resulting in consolidation of farms, and some falling in population.

(5) The school and district structure

The Ejanding people live in the Dowerin Shire. Their local government seat is in Dowerin. Most play sport, have close friends and relatives there, and transact business in the township. Thus, although their sense of community may have a principal focus at Ejanding, they have other allegiances in Dowerin. These allegiances are reinforced by links which the Ejanding school has with the Dowerin school.

It has been the experience in the Shire that, when small schools close, there is considerable disruption of this district structure. Some Ejanding people would be forced to send their children to centres other than Dowerin if the Ejanding school closed. This would significantly change their patterns of social and economic behaviour. People in both Ejanding and Dowerin would suffer socially and economically if this was the case:

We do all our business in Dowerin. We play sport - football and hockey in Dowerin and our parents live there. If we have to send our kids to Wyalkatchem we would become more and more involved in Wyalkatchem. If they go to Ejanding its all right. We would rather drive the kids to Ejanding than have them go to Wyalkatchem. (A community member)

When Minnivale school closed we (Dowerin) lost a lot of people to Wyalkatchem. The kids were bussed to Wyalkatchem, so the parents had to go there. Our business suffered and our sporting and recreational clubs did too. Its bad for the district. (Dowerin shire official)

The community recognizes that the small Ejanding school plays an important part in maintaining the social and economic structure of the district as a whole.

(6) The school's community

The discussion above argues that the school at Ejanding plays a significant role in the educational, social and economic activity of the Ejanding community members. To have any real significance, this discussion assumes that the Ejanding community is an important and valuable entity. It is relevant therefore to ask how important the community is to Ejanding people in the broader context of their many sporting, religious, commercial and family links to the centres which surround them.

This question is necessarily difficult to answer, since the focus of this study has been rather introspective, on the Ejanding school community. There is no doubt that the Ejanding community has diminished somewhat in the last few years. The population has dwindled, the hall has deteriorated, the football club and tennis club have closed. However, more recently the hall has been refurbished, a tennis club is developing, the school is strongly supported and many maintain that the population has reached a stable plateau. Furthermore, political pressure has been exerted from time to time to maintain the school at Ejanding. Thus, although the significance of Ejanding to Ejandingites is difficult to gauge accurately, there is no doubt that Ejanding is important to them.

Another means of assessing the importance of the school to the community is to examine who in the community actively concern themselves with the school. Past-parents and ex-students, parents of future students as well as local residents all have ties with the school. It is clear that the 'Ejanding school community' and the wider 'Ejanding community' are largely synonymous. When talking about the role of the school in the community, it is important to bear in mind that we are talking about the whole community - not just parents of students. This makes the roles of the school in the community - i.e., the educational function, the community identity function, the social and recreational function and the economic function - all the more significant as aspects of Ejanding.

2.1.4 The role of the community in the school

It is often argued that parental and community participation in schools is a desirable feature of education, that parents have a right to participate and that this participation will improve the quality of education. These feelings are shared by the people at Ejanding. The community members have strong feelings of ownership of their school. They take pride in its appearance and in its facilities and resources. They are concerned with how it compares with schools in other communities, and feel responsible for ensuring its quality in some areas.

We've got more than you could wish for. Book-wise we've got the best around here. When we throw the school open, people are amazed at what we've got. The playground needs more though. (A parent)

We get involved in the school because it helps us to understand what the kids are up to and it keeps the community together. It's good because of the social contacts with other people in the area, and it helps the school work. (A parent)

Part of this ownership of the school are the extensive functions of the Parents and Citizens' Association (P & C) in the school. These functions are discussed below.

(1) The P & C as a source of material assets and resources

The P & C Association, which includes 100 per cent of the families in the school, makes considerable financial, material and labour input to the upkeep and development of the school. The P & C have several resources to draw upon to provide these facilities and services.

The P & C conduct a number of fund-raising activities. Over the last two years, such activities have included catering for a local farm clearing-sale, conducting a bottle drive, and fund-raising at the Dowerin Field Day. Infrequently, a financial levy is applied on parents. The most recent levy was applied to subsidize the bus run when numbers fell below the 11 required for a Government contract. In addition, a yearly donation to the P & C funds is made by each family. It is not unusual for community members other than parents to contribute when funds are needed for specific projects.

The Ejanding parents expect to be, and are, consulted on most items of school expenditure, whether it be from Department funds or funds donated by the P & C. This process usually involves the teacher informing the P & C both of the expenditure proposed, and the rationale behind the proposal.

Through their close contact with the teacher, together with their association with WACSSO¹, the P & C maintain an up-to-date knowledge of resources provided to schools by the Education Department or other bodies such as the Schools Commission. Using this knowledge, the P & C devote time and effort to ensuring that their school takes full advantage of funds, such as the special needs grants, and minor works schemes. In these activities, the P & C rely heavily on the expertise and assistance of the Teacher-in-Charge, his channels of communication to the Regional Education Office, and his knowledge of the administration procedures of the Education Department. However, the P & C often provides the organizational and administrative impetus, and in some cases, the political know-how to ensure that their school is well equipped.

The main reason for attending WACSSO meetings is to learn how the system works and keep in contact with what the school can have. (P & C member)

We have a delegate to WACSSO. We have a stronger voice with problems in country schools. We back up others too. We get a better hearing with the Education Department and with politicians. We'll use anyone. When we got our new school we (the P & C) rang the politician and he pushed. We always let him know if we have a problem. We know him personally and just gently let him know. (An ex-P & C office-bearer)

For example, through their association with WACSSO, the P & C have learned about funds available through Education Department programmes. Use of these funds has resulted in the purchase of items such as air conditioners, a new school building, school-books, playground facilities and fly-wire doors.

¹ Western Australian Council of State School Organizations

Further support for the school is supplied by the P & C in the form of busy-bees. Activities such as grounds maintenance and repair of the 'old school building' are regularly undertaken by P & C busy-bees.

The strong support of the community contributes to the quality of the school. That this support can also be critical for the very survival of the school was illustrated by the example of the levy applied to maintain the school bus run. If this had not happened, the school might have closed, since the children would have had to use the bus runs of other schools.

(2) The P & C as a source of administrative guidance and assistance

The Ejanding community has a traditional timetable of events which happen at Ejanding School regardless of changes of teacher. The annual Christmas concert, which is held in third term each year, is one such tradition. The teacher is expected to prepare the children and organize the occasion, which is in effect a major Christmas celebration. Another community-promoted activity is the annual combined sports day at Cadoux, where the Ejanding school acts as a faction in the Cadoux school sports. Newly arrived teachers learn about, and are encouraged to adopt, those activities.

*Some teachers have tried to change things - the concert for example, but it still goes on.
(A parent)*

The camp was booked before I got here. The parents approached me and told me about it. (The teacher)

The responsibility which Ejanding community members adopt in this regard is by no means effortless. For instance, despite the concern and activity which the P & C Association displays in its various roles in the school, there is a feeling amongst some parents that they are not able to participate as much as they would like.

It's hard for parents to keep up with trends. We need the teachers to co-operate and tell us what's going on. The WACSSO Journal is good but we would like to know more. (A parent)

(3) Curriculum assistance

The Ejanding community expects the teacher to cover the academic subjects of the Ejanding school curriculum. Reading, writing and arithmetic are considered the domain of the teacher as expert. Any queries or requests parents have about their children's academic progress are handled on an individual parent-to-teacher basis, not as a P & C responsibility.

However, non-academic curriculum areas such as sport, art and sewing are considered, to some extent, to be a community responsibility. The community expects to supplement an individual teacher's expertise in these areas. Sewing-classes for instance, were suggested and implemented by the P & C. Sport and athletics training is assisted by the P & C. The P & C are also involved in arranging school camps, such as those the school has undertaken to Point Peron, and in exchange visits to Benger School. These activities have been encouraged and paid for by the P & C. The educational programme on these ventures is left to the teacher but the parents assist in the administration, transport and public relations activities. Similarly, school picnics, in which nature study, art and sport are incorporated, depend on assistance from the P & C. Parents also listen to children read in school time, freeing the teacher to concentrate more fully on other students. This practice is a weekly affair. Similarly, art lessons have been given by a parent (an ex-teacher) to supplement the teacher's activities. Every week a roster of parents provide the cars and the time to transport the students into Dowerin for the Friday afternoon sports with students of the Dowerin District High School.

It is interesting that, although the teacher is trusted and expected to have the expertise to teach the academic subjects, the community members do not feel obliged to remain passive in this area. For example, remedial reading classes were arranged by a concerned parent for her child independently of, although in consultation with, the teacher. This involved enlisting a retired teacher who lives in the district as a private tutor. Since the school system was unable to provide this help, the parent turned to a source outside the school.

(4) Parents as a source of motivation and emotional support

To the Ejanding people the school is an important means of reinforcing in their children desired goals, aspirations and way of life. They feel an ownership for, and an identity with, the school. This leads to a considerable degree of interaction between teachers and the community, with parents having frequent formal and informal contact with the teacher. The teacher gains an appreciation of the children which he may not otherwise gain. He knows them not only as members of his class but as members of their families. He knows their mothers and fathers, their brothers and sisters. He knows of family upsets and special problems.

Parents are able to monitor closely their children's progress. At social events, or when they drop in at school, they ask how their child is doing. Constant feed-back is therefore obtained. The support and reinforcement of school activities by parents, and vice versa, is an important characteristic of this school and its community.

In their close contact with the school, parents also provide recognition and support to the teacher. They provide feed-back to him on school activities. The teacher is made to feel that his efforts are worth while. This aspect is particularly important in an environment where the teacher has little contact with colleagues, and where teachers are often young and relatively unsupervised. The parent contact, interest and concern is therefore a valuable asset to the teacher.

The parents and the teacher at Ejanding claim that there are few discipline problems at the school. The children almost always do their homework. The teacher rarely has difficulty with children who lack motivation. The children strive to do well, but are accepted and supported whatever their abilities. To a considerable degree this situation is attributed by staff and parents to the mutual reinforcement of behaviour at home and in school.

You can make the school a part of the community. It's easier to line up kids, parents and the school, especially with respect to attitudes. (The teacher)

Needless to say, problems can arise.

Some community ideas on education are not in agreement with educational practice and you need to develop or redirect these ideas and the problem is how not to offend, but reject a bad idea. (The teacher)

Such problems are not common. In fact, it seems that the close school-community relationships foster the mutual understandings - the teacher understands, and is understood.

2.2 Dumbleyung School and its community

2.2.1 Dumbleyung community

Dumbleyung townsite is also situated within the wheatbelt area of Western Australia. It has a population of 263¹, and is the seat of local government for the Shire of Dumbleyung. It is nearly 300 kilometres from Perth, although is within comfortable driving distance of the two major regional centres of Narrogin and Katanning. It is a compact settlement, as is indicated by the aerial photograph on the opposite page, with the skyline dominated by the wheat-bin nestling near the railway-line. Other than the Dumbleyung townsite, there is one other, but much smaller, population centre in the shire, as well as several tiny hamlets.

Three-quarters of the Dumbleyung Shire residents are directly involved in farming. Most of the remainder of the employed population work in some form of service activity, such as education, law enforcement, and medical activities, the majority of which are located in the Dumbleyung township itself.

The population of Dumbleyung Shire is declining. Farms are becoming larger as farmers buy out their neighbours. Bigger machinery and greater efficiency have diminished the manpower needed to produce the district's wheat and wool. Absentee farming is becoming more common. The average family size is tending to become smaller. Fast, comfortable cars and better communication have made nearby regional centres in other shires feasible alternatives for shopping and business transactions. Employment prospects for youngsters are limited. Only the sons of farmers have any realistic expectation of permanent employment within the Shire.

¹ 1976 ABS census figures

Fig. 2 Aerial photograph of Dumbleyung



It seems likely that these population-depleting factors will continue. On the other hand, factors which might cause a population growth or stabilization and consequent community development are emerging. The spiralling cost of fuel makes travel to nearby centres less attractive. There is an increasing determination by some members of the close-knit community to 'save' their town. An embryonic tourist committee has opened a tourist information office, which is aimed not only at capturing the interest of the passing tourist by advertising the natural beauty of the Dumbleyung salt lake but also at promoting more observable activity in an area of the town which is characterized by closed shops. In this way it is proposed to arouse interest and concern for their town in the Dumbleyung residents themselves. A small museum of farm machinery has been developed, and recent re-development of several small commercial enterprises in the town have begun. Similarly there is some disapproval of residents who shop out of the town for items which can be bought locally. Further, there are efforts being made to negotiate a loan for the building of a large heated swimming-pool, a facility which will not only provide enjoyment for residents but which may draw non-residents to Dumbleyung and thus stimulate community development and business.

Like Ejanding, the Dumbleyung community is far flung, incorporating not only the town's people but also the families on surrounding farms. A significant feature of the Dumbleyung community is the way it is welded together by an extensive network of sports, recreation and community-oriented clubs and associations around which community life revolves. Rare indeed is the Dumbleyung resident who is not affiliated in some way with one or more of the sporting groups such as bowling, football, cricket, badminton, tennis, sailing and hockey. Groups such as P & C, pre-primary parents, fire brigade, CWA, and church and service groups further contribute to the large number of associations which form the backbone of the Dumbleyung community. These affiliations engender the feelings of belonging and the feelings of responsibility which create the community bonding at Dumbleyung. For example, one person who works and sometimes shops in the town maintains that she is not really part of the Dumbleyung community because she plays sport in another locality in the shire. Another person confirmed the importance of affiliations with these groups by saying:

You've really got to take part and be interested in groups if you want to feel part of it (the community). I wasn't born in the community so I joined to become part of it.

The wide ranging and numerous clubs and associations and the small population means that there are considerable demands made on both individuals' time and fund-raising capabilities within the community. Not everyone participates fully in the community's social and sporting life, but most have feelings of duty and enjoyment in being part of this active community hub.

On the whole, the individuals who live in the Dumbleyung community form a cohesive, homogeneous group, whose interests largely coincide. Over 95 per cent are of European origin, and the majority have long been residents of the area. In one sense, this cohesiveness makes it difficult for some. Members of transient populations, Aboriginal families, or those people whose leisure interests are markedly different from those currently in vogue at Dumbleyung, tend to be somewhat separate from the mainstream of community life.

Thus, while Dumbleyung may be described as having a relatively traditional, close-knit, prosperous and homogeneous life-style, patterned around farming and sporting activities, there nevertheless is some diversity of interests, and a complexity of economic conditions and demographic pressures which form a marked contrast with the tiny Ejanding hamlet.

2.2.2 Dumbleyung School

The school at Dumbleyung is a district high school. It has 28 pre-primary students, 99 students in Years 1 to 7 and 30 students in Years 8 to 10.¹ For many purposes, the organization of the pre-primary section, and to a lesser extent the primary, is separate from the secondary section of the school. In addition to the Principal, there are four full-time primary

¹ It is also the venue for night classes organized by the Technical Extension Service, and is currently offering four courses for adults. This service is part of the Technical Education Division activities, and is generally run on a part-time basis by the principal of a school or his nominee. Use is made of local expertise and interest when a course is offered.

School facilities are also used by two students studying with the Isolated Students Matriculation Scheme.

teachers and two part-time staff for administrative and teacher-relief work in the primary school. The secondary section of the school has four full-time teachers, a part-time music teacher and a part-time business education teacher. The pre-primary section has one teacher and a pre-primary aide. In addition, a librarian is employed for two days per week, and 11 other people have support duties in cleaning, gardening, clerical and bus-driving capacities.

The school buildings for the primary and secondary sections of the school are physically separated from the pre-primary campus. This is due mainly to the latter's historical origins as an institution separate from the Education Department.

The school children come to school from their homes as far away as 32 kilometres. Four buses begin collecting children from their homes as early as 7.30 a.m., transport them to and from school, and deposit them home again, some children arriving home just before five o'clock in the evening.

2.2.3 The role of the school in the community

In the small and closely knit community of Dumbleyung, the astonishing number of associations, institutions and community groups are woven into a complex mesh of interrelationships. Each group has its own particular sphere of interest and responsibility. It is expected that each will participate in a broad spectrum of community-oriented activities. The Dumbleyung school is no exception in this regard. Besides its purely educational role, it plays an important part in many other spheres of the community. Each of these roles is briefly discussed below. The discussion illustrates that the school is very important to Dumbleyung and in some ways is the prima donna of the community's many groups.

The outline presented below is a distillation of the discussion with a wide range of people within the community. Different community members hold different perceptions of the various roles of the school in their community. Parents of children at the school tend to be primarily concerned with the school's educational role. Other community members, especially those with larger business interests or with responsibilities for district well-being, hold a broader conceptualization of the school's role in the community.

Similarly, people's hopes and aspirations for the community's development also seem to influence their perception of the role of the school in the community. Those whose allegiance to community development is strong are very conscious of the school's broader, non-educational role. Those whose interests in the growth of Dumbleyung are not as developed see the school merely as a means of providing an educational service.

(1) The school as an educational institution

When it comes to providing an educational service, the school at Dumbleyung is subject to a number of differing expectations reflecting the diversity of opinion within the community. Nevertheless, there are some commonly held expectations of the school, particularly concerning the primary and pre-primary sections. The school staff must:

- (a) Develop in children a grasp of reading, writing and mathematics.
- (b) Exert a strong but humane discipline.
- (c) Reinforce the community's way of life, oriented as it is towards sport, community participation and corporate responsibility for community affairs.
- (d) Treat the children with respect and kindness.
- (e) Work in harmony as a team.
- (f) Be communicative and easily approachable about the children's activities in the school.

In mild contrast to the primary part of the school, the secondary section is not as well supported by the population at Dumbleyung. This situation reflects, amongst other things, the diversity of functions desired of a secondary school, not all of which are currently accommodated at the Dumbleyung School.

The patterns of secondary schooling adopted by Dumbleyung residents are varied. Some students leave Dumbleyung at the end of the Year 7 to attend private schools in Perth, or to board in Government hostels in Perth or in surrounding larger centres. Others leave Dumbleyung at the end of Year 10 to continue their education elsewhere. Some boys attend agricultural schools. Others leave Dumbleyung school after Year 10 in order to obtain work. The complexity and diversity in community feeling regarding secondary schools and what they should do are reflected in these patterns.

The decisions as to whether, and when, to enrol children in schools outside the shire is hard for parents. Although they believe that the tuition and standards of education in the secondary school are excellent there are other issues to consider. Some of these issues include:

- (a) The importance of family life. Has the family environment significantly more to offer the young adolescent than boarding school?
- (b) The number of peers. What are the effects of the limited opportunities for developing social interaction skills and competitive spirit in the small district high school?
- (c) Independence. What is the importance of the independence gained by youngsters living away from home?
- (d) Option subjects. The range of option subjects at the district high school is limited, and those offered tend to be in non-academic areas. Does this reduce students' opportunities?
- (e) Continuity in secondary education. What is the effect of a disruptive change of school during secondary education if the child remains in the local school until the end of Year 10, then transfers?
- (f) Cost. The cost of sending children to board away from home is high.
- (g) Broadened horizons. What other opportunities will the children have to experience social life away from their own town, other than at secondary school?
- (h) Tradition. To some families, the patterns of schooling adopted is a family tradition. Frequently, the pattern of schooling to be adopted is decided before a child's birth.

Other than these broad issues, there are further decisions to be made which depend upon the particular needs of the child. For example, girls are more frequently expected to complete their compulsory education at Dumbleyung, since it is assumed that they will have to leave the community after compulsory schooling to gain employment and specialized employment training. Consequently they are ensured of gaining some

experience of the outside world. Conversely, boys who are expected to return to the family farm may go away to school sooner, to ensure that they have an opportunity to experience the wider community before settling into the farming life-style. In general, parents believe that students talented academically, in the arts, or in sport benefit from the specialized tuition found in the city or in larger surrounding towns and schools. These points are illustrated by the following comments.

All kids want to go away at some time, to get away from the farm and to see what its like in Perth. You learn to cope without your family, and even through you don't want to you know you should. (A Year 8 student)

When we made the decision to send our child away at the end of Year 7 it was because the Year 8 class was going to be very small that year. They were all lovely kids but there was just not enough scope for social interaction. (A mother)

Kids who go away after Year 10 do just as well academically and socially as those who go away after primary school. We want to watch our family grow, and once they've gone you don't get them back. (A mother)

Our eldest went to college after Year 7; she was musically talented. The youngest will stay at Dumbleyung till Year 11. He likes helping on the farm and he's learning about the farm. It depends on the particular child. (A parent)

If children have to swap schools half-way through their secondary education, they have to adapt. They may be ahead, they may be behind, but they are different! (A parent)

Clearly the presence of Dumbleyung School ensures that there is a choice in patterns of schooling. It enables a choice to be made of either a local education, or an education in another community. The choice has to be made in term of costs and benefits associated with each alternative. It is the right to this choice which is strongly defended by all Dumbleyung residents.

(2) The school's role in community communication

The Dumbleyung School has characteristics which give it a unique position amongst institutions in Dumbleyung, and which make it especially important to the maintenance and development of community well-being.

One such special characteristic is the school's direct contact with at least 80 families within the community. These families come from the whole spectrum of social and economic situations within the community. Viewed in this context, it is perhaps not surprising to find that the school plays a central role in the community communication pattern. The weekly school newsletter is a commonly used news medium for many community groups. For example, in 1979 it carried notices from the Shire Council regarding a fund-raising social event; from the Western Australian Ballet Company regarding performances in the region; from tertiary institutions regarding external courses available; from the Red Cross calling for blood donors; from a major department store regarding items for sale; and from a variety of sporting groups regarding coaching or displays provided for the community.

If you want anyone to know of a social event, it's handy to put a notice in the school newsletter. We get a better response from that than from the local newspaper or radio. I don't know what I'll do when my kids leave the school. (A parent)

The school's central role in community communication is well illustrated in regard to sport. Many of the community's sports clubs have junior sections, and since most of the children in the community attend the school, the clubs utilize the school as a centre for these activities. Some of the older schoolchildren also play sport in the senior teams, as do many teachers, so the school is a natural centre for these too.

(3) The school as a social support unit

The school at Dumbleyung has another characteristic which reinforces its unique position in the town. It exerts a considerable direct influence on population levels in the town. Staff members who are not permanent Dumbleyung residents contribute to the population of the town, and teenagers can stay in the town during their early secondary education years.

Teachers and the older school students play a significant role in the town's sporting and social life. Teachers' contributions to administration of committees and councils are welcomed by a community almost saturated with committees and councils. For example, teachers hold offices in the golf club, the football club and the tourist committee. Teachers and older students also provide extra numbers to participate in team sports. Without them, Dumbleyung community may have difficulty in fielding some of the sports teams which are so important to the way of life. Teachers' experience and interest in the coaching and development of community sport is also most important.

The recent history of community development in the town provides several examples of the enthusiasm, the new ideas, and the 'new blood' brought to the town by school staff. For example, on the initiative of a principal and staff of the school, the conversion of an old shop into a squash court was undertaken. This event has not only improved sporting facilities in the community but has succeeded in drawing visitors from larger surrounding towns to Dumbleyung. Initiatives taken jointly by school teachers, shire personnel, P & C and community members have resulted in the building at the school of floodlit basketball courts to replace community courts which had deteriorated. They are used by both the school and the community. The young school staff is also a much valued source of social or marriage partners. Particularly at this time when the economic situation necessitates the exodus from the district of many young adults who do not have a farm to go to, a ready supply of partners at the school (and the hospital) is a valued contribution to community life. As one young teacher jokingly observed, it is best for the community if teachers are either "back pockets or marriageable females".

(4) The school in the economic community

The school is a major employer in the town. Since many of the school's employees, such as the bus drivers and cleaners, and some teachers are permanent local residents, their contribution to the economic flow in the community is large. Additionally, even staff who are not permanent Dumbleyung residents spend most of the school year in the town and further contribute to the town's economic well-being.

As a direct consequence of the school's presence in the town, other businesses in the shire also benefit. For instance, one shop in the town regularly employs one person part-time to cope with the trade from school-children's lunch orders. Also home-economics supplies are purchased from a local shop.

Dumbleyung commercial enterprises compete with larger and better-stocked shops and facilities in the nearby larger towns. It is commonly believed that Dumbleyung business is suffering as a result of this competition. Nevertheless, many Dumbleyung residents still buy day-to-day goods and groceries from Dumbleyung shops, and the school is thought to play an important role in this. As at Ejanding, it has been observed that some community members whose children do not attend the local school are likely to shop in larger towns. Consequently, some trade is lost to the town. This point was succinctly put by two veteran community members, who said:

No school - no small town. Dumbleyung would fall away if we didn't have a school. (A community member)

I shop at Katanning and get my car serviced there. We'd do more in Katanning if the kids didn't go to school here (in Dumbleyung). When they go to school in Narrogin, we'll do more shopping there I suppose. (A parent)

The school, particularly the secondary part of the school, contributes to the attractiveness of the town in ways which make it a significant factor in aiding the atmosphere of economic bouyancy of the district.

When we are looking for staff or when Government employees are thinking of coming to Dumbleyung, it is a big advantage to be able to say we've got a high school. People don't mind bringing their families if their kids can go to school and if its large enough to have a high school. (A Shire official)

(5) The school and community resource development

Raising funds for the many clubs and activities which operate in Dumbleyung is a constant headache for each group, a headache exacerbated by the groups' small and overlapping membership. The administration and upkeep of resources and facilities used by each group, including facilities owned by the Shire such as the sports pavilion, are pressing responsibilities which are felt by many in the community.

You have to take your turn on committees and doing the work. We swap around and spread the load but you always feel that you should be doing something and we're always fund-raising. (A community member)

In this environment it is effective for groups to share resources, facilities and their administration, upkeep and initial cost. In this respect, the school at Dumbleyung is important. Its capital expenditure on facilities and resources such as sporting fields and equipment, and on machinery and appliances is large in comparison to the resources available to most other community groups. Further, these facilities and resources are maintained and administered by school staff. The school shares its video equipment, a public address system, sporting equipment, home economics facilities, and library equipment and facilities. This enables the community to offer a wider range of activities than one might expect in a town of that size.

Further examples of this interaction of school and community include the basketball courts, constructed on school grounds and maintained by the school, but built by the P & C, the Shire and the basketball club as a community facility. At present a pool committee in Dumbleyung is trying to negotiate a loan for the construction of a large swimming-pool, a scheme which is likely to be successful only if the whole community, and especially the school (i.e., the Education Department) are actively supportive. This scheme, if successful, is seen as one of the major steps towards the further growth and development of Dumbleyung town by attracting swimmers from outside the Shire.

(6) The school as an integral part of ongoing community activity

The school at Dumbleyung, like any community structure has community-oriented 'duties' to discharge. The undertaking of these duties reflects the attitude that the community's viability depends on co-operation and community spirit.

Amongst the school's duties in this regard is involvement in the annual charity gymkhana in which the school traditionally has many parts to play. It exhibits school-work, is used as a collection depot for food sold during the day and encourages the children to participate in competitions. The school parents' committee has responsibility for the fishing and pony-riding events, selling showbags and organizing the merry-go-rounds and train rides.

Similarly, the school is expected to take a major role in training junior sports teams and fostering junior sport in general. The original wooden classroom, which is being preserved by the P & C as a museum, is seen as a particular asset to the Shire as an historical interest point. Occasionally the students' council at the school is approached to assist community activities such as Shire litter drives, the football club cabaret and the gymkhana. Without doubt, the school is regarded as an important community group whose resources should be utilized to further community well-being.

2.2.4 The role of the community in the school

In comparison with Ejanding, the Dumbleyung community has a less pervasive and less systematic impact on the educational activities of the school. Other than the greater complexity of the school itself, there are several factors which appear to delimit the community's part in the school.

Firstly, the school is subject to a wide range of demands and expectations which emanate from different sections of the community. Sometimes these conflict.

They play far too much sport at the school.
(A parent)

I'm very happy with the sport they play at Dumbleyung, although I'd like to see more emphasis and time spent on proper training for competition.
(A parent)

Secondly, the individual teachers and the school itself do not have the central role to play in the community when it comes to integrating children into the local way of life. Unlike the situation at Ejanding, the school is only one of many family-oriented community groups where parents and the community develop attitudes and skills in their children.

Thirdly, the level of resources supplied by the Department results in less need for assistance from parents and the community.

However, despite these factors, the community does have a significant part to play in the school. It relies on community facilities and resources to provide the extras which contribute to the quality of educational offering, and provides a valuable guiding influence on school activities.

(1) The community as a source of expertise, facilities and resources

In examining the role the community plays in the school, one is struck by the need to approach the topic from a historical perspective. The community has a history of possessiveness and protectiveness towards the school and many people take a proprietary interest in it. Many community members have laboured to prepare the school oval, or to maintain or improve aspects of the school such as the old wooden school building. Others have been associated with lobbying at political, Education Department and community levels for issues such as the creation of a secondary component to the school. Now, however, the community point out that some aspects of the responsibilities which they historically assumed have been taken over by the State Government. They consider that the part they once had to play is now reduced.

Even though the degree of active commitment to school activities may have declined, the community still plays its part. The school utilizes community facilities and services. For instance, each year the Shire informally takes the responsibility for grading the oval and supplying sand for the school sports carnivals. Other Shire facilities, such as the tennis courts, are available for school use. Resident policemen give lectures to students - an event which is no doubt educational for the children and of use to the police-force as well. Visits by school groups to community facilities such as the fire brigade, post office and hospital provide opportunities for interesting and inexpensive learning experiences. Skills of community members are exploited - of the local mechanic in the night class course 'Know Your Car', and of art and craft, floral art and cake decorating experts for other courses.

On a more systematic and institutionalized level, the functions of the P & C are characterized by some tradition and formality. It is interesting to note that regular P & C meetings are not widely attended. However, the functions and activities of the P & C are. Busy-bees assist in the maintenance of school facilities. Fund-raising activities, such as screenings, drives and catering by P & C at social functions provide funds for a variety of purposes. The P & C subsidize travel costs for school activities conducted outside Dumbleyung and, at the Principal's request, have purchased items such as curtains for the resource centre and duplicating equipment. In addition, parents organize the school library during lunch times so that it is open when the school librarian is not on duty. In addition, parents of pre-school children act as 'parent help' each day in the pre-school centre. The P & C organization also takes a major administrative and co-ordinating role in the inter-school sports held in conjunction with surrounding schools, and in the school's responsibilities towards the annual Dumbleyung gymkhana. P & C members can always be relied upon to help in the many and varied events which tax a small school's capacity - such as a recent fluoridization programme conducted at the school by a dental health researcher.

(2) The role of the community in school organization

The community at Dumbleyung, with encouragement from the Principal, is beginning to take an increased interest in educational issues at the school.

The P & C can't really focus its attention on small concrete things now. It seems that our function can now expand and be more relevant to what's happening to our kids. (A parent)

There are already indications of the impact the community might have through its close contact with the school and the school staff. For instance:

The reception the Shire puts on for the new principal and teachers is to welcome them - let them get to know all the councillors. They get off onto the right foot. We invite them to join the clubs and open the doors to Dumbleyung. We generally get them to fit in. (A Shire official)

I don't go to P & C meetings often - just occasionally when I feel that I have to say something - like the way they run the sport at the school. (A parent)

Things are moving so fast in society today and so I like to encourage the school to make use of all facilities they can to develop the kids. I ring up to suggest things. (A parent)

The contact between school staff and community which makes it possible for community members to effect change is frequent, often informal, or in a social context. Besides the community reception, there are P & C meetings and formal invitations each term for parents to discuss their children's progress. Parents individually visit the school to discuss particular problems with members of the school executive or with the teacher of their child. Many parents, and children for that matter, play sport in the same team as the school staff, or belong to the same recreation club or association. In a small town, parents, teachers and students are constantly meeting in day-to-day activities. On these occasions teachers and community members inevitably discuss the school, each learning of the others viewpoint. Children are known by teachers as members of families and as members of community groups. Consequently the school's activities and organization is integrated with, and complementary to, community life.

Not unexpectedly, there is evidence of some barriers to the community's participation in the school.

I think some parents are frightened to come to the school to complain for fear of reaction from teachers to their children. (A teacher)

It's no good to see the school about things you think. They're the experts. Anyway, their hands are tied by Education Department rules.

Thus, it appears that the role of the community in the school reflects the diversity of attitudes in the community. Some people feel a responsibility to influence the activities in the school, but some feel uncomfortable and not useful. Nevertheless, it is clear that the Dumbleyung community have a role in the shaping of school policy and that this role is a consequence of close school and community contact.

2.3 Conclusion

Ejanding and Dumbleyung are examples of communities in which the school and the community are clearly symbiotic. The communities recognize the importance of their school and vice versa. The schools are closely interwoven into the economic, social and recreational patterns of the areas.

At Ejanding the community members 'own' and take responsibility for many aspects of their school. They participate in the activities of the school. The school atmosphere is not discouraging or alien to them and the quality of the school is enhanced by the efforts of the community. There is little conflict and disparity.

At Dumbleyung, an assessment of the school's role in the community is complicated by the fact that the school is not the only institution in the community. However, it is in some ways unique amongst the many community structures at Dumbleyung and has a central role to play in community activity. The community members at Dumbleyung are characterized by diversity in the degree of involvement, interest and concern shown in school affairs, and the school runs more independently of the community. However, the community is a valuable resource for the school and the community's close contact with the school helps mould school policy.

3.0 THE FIT OF THE SCHOOLS TO THEIR COMMUNITIES

This chapter takes a close look at the Ejanding and Dumbleyung schools through the eyes of both the community and school staff. It aims to explore a few aspects of how well the schools fit their community.

Firstly in this chapter, an overview is given of the strengths and weaknesses of the two schools. The second section examines some aspects of Education Department policy which are particularly noteworthy, in either a positive or negative sense, when the non-educational functions of the schools are considered. The third section of this chapter examines how the schools operate despite the geographic and demographic factors of smallness and isolation, and in the context of the characteristic social milieu of the two communities. The final section examines the particular issues, problems and advantages accruing to these schools with regard to their curriculum.

3.1 Major strengths and weaknesses

To set the context of discussion of school and Department policy and practice, an overview of community and staff perceptions of the schools' strengths and weaknesses is appropriate. At such a point it is important to remind the reader that the two schools selected for this study were chosen because, amongst other things, they are considered to be good schools. Each has the strong backing of its community. Each has the strong endorsement of professional educators. Thus, in examining the strengths and weaknesses of these schools, as perceived by people associated with them, the reader must remember that it is the workings of efficient and happy schools that are being scrutinized.

This overview of strengths and weaknesses examines firstly the primary school sections of the two schools, then the secondary section of Dumbleyung school, and finally the organizational integration of primary with secondary at Dumbleyung. This distinction arose because aspects considered beneficial to primary education in the two towns did not evince automatic approval in the context of secondary education. It was a feature of both Ejanding and Dumbleyung that primary education is believed to have a different raison d'être to secondary.

3.1.1 The one-teacher primary school

The interest displayed by Ejanding parents and community members in their school was clearly demonstrated by the wide range of thoughtful comments they made about various aspects of their school. In order to present their comments in an organized manner, the educational enterprise has been divided into four

areas (Worthern and Sanders, 1973, p.128). Those areas are context, input, process and product, and it is this framework within which the perceptions of Ejanding residents are outlined below.

The community pointed out several advantageous aspects of the educational context in which the educational process takes place:

- (1) The cross age/grade contacts between children. Ejanding parents, with their strong community commitment, see the friendships and links between children of different ages within the community as a desirable link in the development of community identity. Children know all the other children in the school and know most of the families and children in the neighbourhood.
- (2) The community and parent involvement in the school and with the teacher. The smallness and cohesion of the Ejanding community, plus its dependence on strong community co-operation, ensures that community participation in the school is high. The parents see this as being a distinct advantage, and believe that strong links between school, home and community are necessary for them to be able to monitor and assess the school.
- (3) The freedom the children have both in the classroom and outside the classroom to organize their own activities. The multigrade classroom organization necessitates that children often work without continual direct supervision by the teacher. Parents claim that this situation assists in the development of responsibility towards work, and skills of initiative and self-direction.
- (4) The protective, family-like environment. The teacher at Ejanding knows the children and their families. Brothers and sisters all belong to the one class. For the whole of their primary school life children are in the same class as their age peers as well as children of other ages. Parents regularly visit the school, and take part in school activities. They believe that the school is in many ways more like a family than larger schools. Parents believe that this environment is an excellent one in which to learn.

- (5) Proximity of the school with its shorter bus trips. The parents believe that the bus trips which many country children must take are long, wearing, boring and bad for the physical and mental health of the children. Consequently, the shorter the bus route, the happier they are.

The disadvantages seen in this area include:

- (1) The cultural isolation of the school and community. The children don't have ready access to theatres, cinemas, book stores, museums and so on.
- (2) School size. This can be a disadvantage if there is only one student in a year grade or if the number grows too large and there is still only one teacher.
- (3) New children have difficulty in gaining acceptance.

The inputs or resources seen as contributory to the quality of education of the children in the area are:

- (1) The physical resources in the school.
- (2) The teacher's aide.
- (3) The 'good' standard of teachers sent to the school.

Some of the worries in this area are:

- (1) Lack of playground facilities.
- (2) The impact that a 'bad' teacher would have.
- (3) Even if the teacher is satisfactory overall, any particular weakness can have serious effects on particular children.

The processes within the school which are seen as advantages are:

- (1) The individual attention that children get from the teacher. A child at Ejanding is usually one of only two or three who work at a particular level in school activities. When a teacher devises a programme of work it is for these particular children, not for a large group. Problems a child has with work are immediately evident. This level of individual attention is recognized and valued by parents.

- (2) The interaction and visits arranged with other groups of children in larger schools and schools from different areas.
- (3) Camps, especially in metropolitan areas.
- (4) All students are involved in all activities such as sport and drama, rather than just the 'best'.
- (5) The Rural Integration Project, as carried out in this school. This programme, which enables pre-school children to attend the school although there is no pre-school centre, is seen as a particularly valuable development.

The weaknesses in the education process seen by the community include the following:

- (1) The school reporting format does not give enough information about the standard of achievement with respect to criteria expected of children of the same year of schooling.
- (2) There are not enough excursions to help the children learn about, and cope with, city life. This is seen as a necessary skill for many children.
- (3) At the upper level of the school there is not enough "in-depth" discussion of current affairs or of how various important social institutions work.
- (4) Small numbers lead to a lack of competition and diminished opportunity for team sports.
- (5) Many cultural activities are missed by the children.
- (6) Since there is only one staff member in the Ejanding school, there is only one person with whom parents can discuss problems. At Dumbleyung, this problem does not occur since there is a principal, deputy principal and many teachers to whom parents can speak, a fact appreciated by Dumbleyung residents.
- (7) If for some reason the teacher is not suited to the needs of the community, the community members do not have a mechanism by which they can discuss with the Education Department what they might do about the problem without putting the teacher's career at risk.

The outcomes (or products) which are seen as strengths of the school include the following:

- (1) The standard of education as indicated by the fact that students are well prepared for secondary education. They do well when they go to high school.
- (2) The students develop consideration for others and a sense of 'community' and co-operation.
- (3) Shy children are given a chance to develop confidence, and have an important role to play.
- (4) Students are likely to see themselves as individuals engaged in a corporate activity, rather than as members of a group passing through a routine process.

The major weakness seen as a product of the school is that the children may not learn to mix with others and are often shy. This is particularly apparent when the children go to boarding-school. This suggests that in terms of social interaction, the small school is like an 'extended family'. As a consequence, it may not prepare students for dealing with strangers.

Perceptions of school staff and other educators largely parallel the perceptions of the community members. Like them, the staff believe that individual strengths and weaknesses of children become obvious very rapidly. The children's work is self-directed and they learn how to organize themselves, and learn to be responsible for their work. The children are known by the teacher in their social and family context, as well as the school context, so a friendly and supportive environment develops.

In addition to these assets, staff members also believe that the children become more tolerant towards age or ability differences, and more accepting of individuals on the basis of their strengths and uniqueness. Peer tutoring, and the co-operative orientation to activity required to operate in a school like this, engender responsibility for others.

From the teacher's point of view, there are several features of the one-teacher organizational pattern which could be considered as strengths. Equipment, timetabling and use of school facilities are completely at the discretion of the one teacher. Structural organization is minimal, so there is flexible and efficient use of time and materials. Bells do not ring at an untimely point in a lesson. Teaching aids and materials do not have to be shared. The library is never booked by someone else. Co-ordination of teachers and classes is unnecessary. Similarly, as was pointed out by the teacher-in-charge:

Support staff such as advisory teachers, and superintendents when they visit the school come to assist you. Every part of the school is your responsibility so their advice can be of enormous benefit.

A significant difference in attitude between the Ejanding and Dumbleyung communities, other than those arising from structural differences in the schools, is in their predisposition to what would be 'ideal'. Dumbleyung residents have the organizational pattern of a larger school in mind as they discuss their small school. For instance, at Dumbleyung, there is not universal support for the association of siblings in one class, nor for multi-grade classes.

When my two children were in the same class, the youngest got lazy because the elder one helped all the time. (A parent)

Ejanding residents, on the other hand, clearly do not consider large school organizations to be possible or even desirable in their context, and seem to assess the strengths and weaknesses of their school independently of their perception of other types of schools.

3.1.2 Secondary education in the district high school

Over the last decade, an average of 63 per cent of students stayed at Dumbleyung School past Year 7. Parents of these children are very happy with the school. They see it as an efficient and natural extension of the primary school. They value it for the nurturant atmosphere, because it provides opportunities for the children to stay in their family environment for their early teens. The non-academic areas of the school are lauded. The extensive range of manual arts and home economics equipment is looked upon with satisfaction. The sporting and library resources are similarly viewed. Parents are convinced of the excellence of academic tuition in the secondary section of the school. They are pleased with the individual attention afforded the child in the small secondary class. They point with pride to the children who leave the secondary part of Dumbleyung and excel in both the academic and social life of the school to which they go. Nevertheless, they do have worries:

- The small number of students within class groups is seen by both staff and community members at Dumbleyung as a particular problem at secondary level. The children, it is claimed, establish set patterns of achievement. In a small class, they rank themselves on academic, sporting and social criteria, and tend to maintain this level. The beneficial effects of competition, so crucial to secondary education, are thus missed. The teachers' expectation may also reflect these self-imposed levels.

- The breadth of social life of secondary children is a problem. The restricted potential for making new friends means that social development may be limited. No experience of the wider world is gained. A group energy is missing. Some claim that a narrow outlook is maintained. In this context, the camps and excursions undertaken by secondary students are the most frequently mentioned strength of the school.

- From an academic point of view the restricted range of option subjects available at the school is a major setback, since some parents would like their children to have language and other specialist tuition which is available at larger schools. They believe that it is the more academically oriented child who is least well catered for at the district high school.

3.1.3 The K-10 structure

From the point of view of both the staff and the community, the district high school organization has many advantages. For instance:

- The extra facilities available to the secondary school improve both the quantity and quality of resources available to the primary students.

- Such an organization saves the community from having to support three separate P & C organizations.

- The community members are very aware of the high cost to the taxpayer of maintaining small rural schools. The relatively cost-efficient organization of a district high school (in contrast to two separate schools) is consequently a major strength of the educational provision at Dumbleyung.

- The financial benefits to individual families who can keep their youngsters at home for their secondary education are recognized.

- Both community members and educators perceive that having both primary and secondary students on the same campus adds to students' personal development. The secondary students learn to act with responsibility towards younger people and become tolerant and caring towards them. The younger students become less awed by the high school operation.
- Transition from primary to secondary school is relaxed.
- Older and younger students appreciate each other more and co-operate with one another. This reinforces favourable attitudes to community involvement.

3.2 Educational policies and practices and community well-being

Ejanding and Dumbleyung schools are not only educational institutions. The previous chapter clearly showed that the schools play an important part in the economic and social life of their communities. However, some school policies and practices do not always reflect this situation. The following describes policies and practices of the school system which, in the light of the schools' role in the community, do not adequately serve the needs of community members.

Firstly, the issue of school closure and school survival is discussed. Secondly, school bus policies are explored, and finally staff needs and staffing policies are discussed, all in the context of their effect on the non-educational aspects of a school's part in a community.

3.2.1 School closure and survival

Falling enrolments (see Figure 3) are a problem at both Ejanding and Dumbleyung schools. To the people of Ejanding, school closure is a threat to their community's existence. Similarly, at Dumbleyung, the secondary section of the school has so few numbers that there is, at least theoretically, the possibility of closure. The closure or maintenance of the secondary school at Dumbleyung is a divisive issue in the community. Some people become quite heated when they discuss the fact that some parents do not send their children to the secondary school. Others are irritated at community pressure which in some ways censors them when their children board away from home for secondary school.

Figure 3: Enrolment trends at Ejanding and Dumbleyung schools.

FIG. 3 ENROLMENT NUMBERS EJANDING 1962-1984

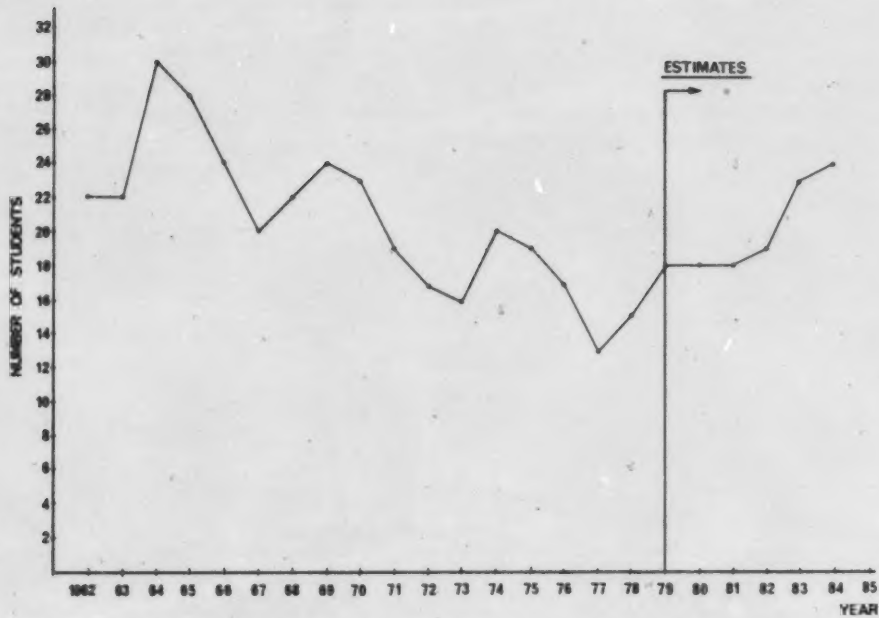
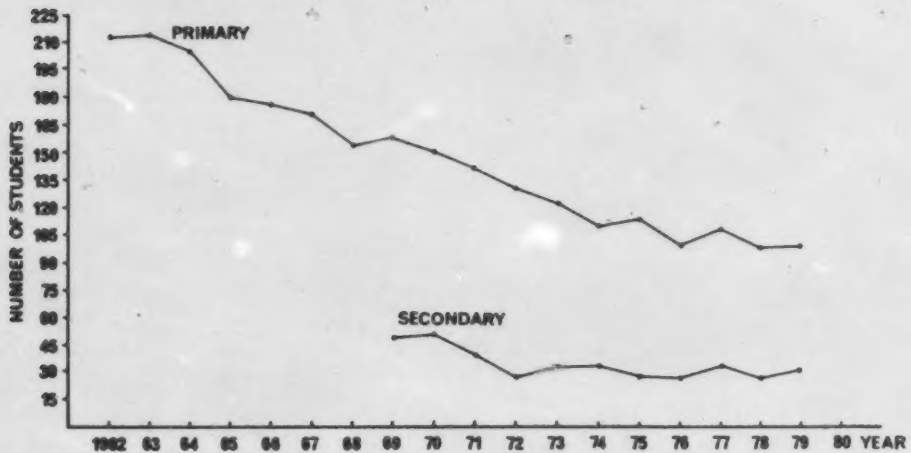


FIG. 3 ENROLMENT NUMBERS DUMBLEYUNG (1962-1980)



Community members are by no means insensitive to the dilemmas which face education authorities, or to the parameters within which educational decisions must be made:

Our big thing is to keep our high school - but I wear two hats and one is as a taxpayer. We have to weigh up whether the costs can be borne.

However, they see the provision of a school in a much wider context than a merely educational one. The Ejanding residents and the majority of Dumbleyung residents are committed to the development of their communities, and want to keep their schools.

Should Dumbleyung have a secondary school? It depends on your view to development. If you want country towns then you keep the school because a school is an integral part of a community.
(A parent)

The Education Department is, of course, not unaware of these issues. The present structure of Dumbleyung school itself illustrates the Department's acceptance of the value of such schools, since the secondary component of the school is, in theory, at risk of closure if the school enrolment falls below 200, with at least 50 in the secondary school. With its present enrolment of less than 150, the continued survival of Years 8 to 10 at Dumbleyung clearly illustrates the recognition by the Department of the value of small schools:

I believe that the K-10 educational plan has positive values. The family unit should be kept intact for as long as possible. Once kids go to boarding-school they don't see their parents again. Parents should have the choice of sending their kids away or not, as they like. The equipment is already there and you can't take it away. There's no additional cost to leave it there. The energy, determination and skill of teachers mean that there is no educational disadvantage. (A senior administrator)

However, there are several Education Department policies which appear to community members to be insensitive to the economic and demographic realities of declining enrolments in their schools.

One criterion used by the Education Department for the closure of primary schools is the average numbers of enrolments, which must not fall below eight. This policy is viewed with apprehension by the Ejanding community. In such a small community natural fluctuations in the numbers of school-age children in the area produce cyclic threats of school closure at Ejanding. Ejanding community members believe that at some time in the future, their school could temporarily run out of students. Furthermore, they believe that, despite the probable resurgence of numbers, Ejanding will be dead and the community lost if the school closes. In this situation, it is apparent that the concept of apparently irreversible closure based solely on present enrolment numbers must be examined closely.

Viewing the school within its community and economic context also throws another light on decisions to close schools in the face of declining enrolments in rural areas. In the economic climate at the moment, farmers in the Dumbleyung area are financially buoyant. Many do not need to send their children to Dumbleyung at present. However, the vagaries of the primary industry are such that this relative affluence may not always be characteristic or widespread. The community members would like to see a facility which avoids the finality of closure.

Besides the 'minimum enrolments' rule there are other policies relating to the viability of the rural school which are critical for a community and school of this nature. Bussing is one such issue.

To have a contract service funded by the Education Department there must be at least 11 children living beyond a radius of 4.5 kilometres from the school. At Ejanding recently the number of children meeting these requirements fell below 11 and the service was only partly subsidized by the Department. This resulted in the community having to choose between closing the school, or subsidizing the costs themselves. They chose the latter, and subsidized the bus until the numbers rose again. This incident awoke in community members the recognition that it is the bus regulations rather than the minimum attendance regulations which could determine a school's continued viability.

A further threat to school and hence community survival lies in the attitudes of both community members and the Education Department to these schools. Taking an active, supportive stance is important since loss of confidence in a school can occur when there is uncertainty regarding the school's future. Once it has started, a decline in enrolments can spiral, much like a run on a bank in which clients have lost confidence.

The move to increase numbers and support the school should have started five years ago. Now it's too much sacrifice for the individuals. (A parent)

Such statements suggest that unless strong support for schools threatened by falling enrolments is encouraged or facilitated, decline is inevitable.

3.2.2 School bus policies

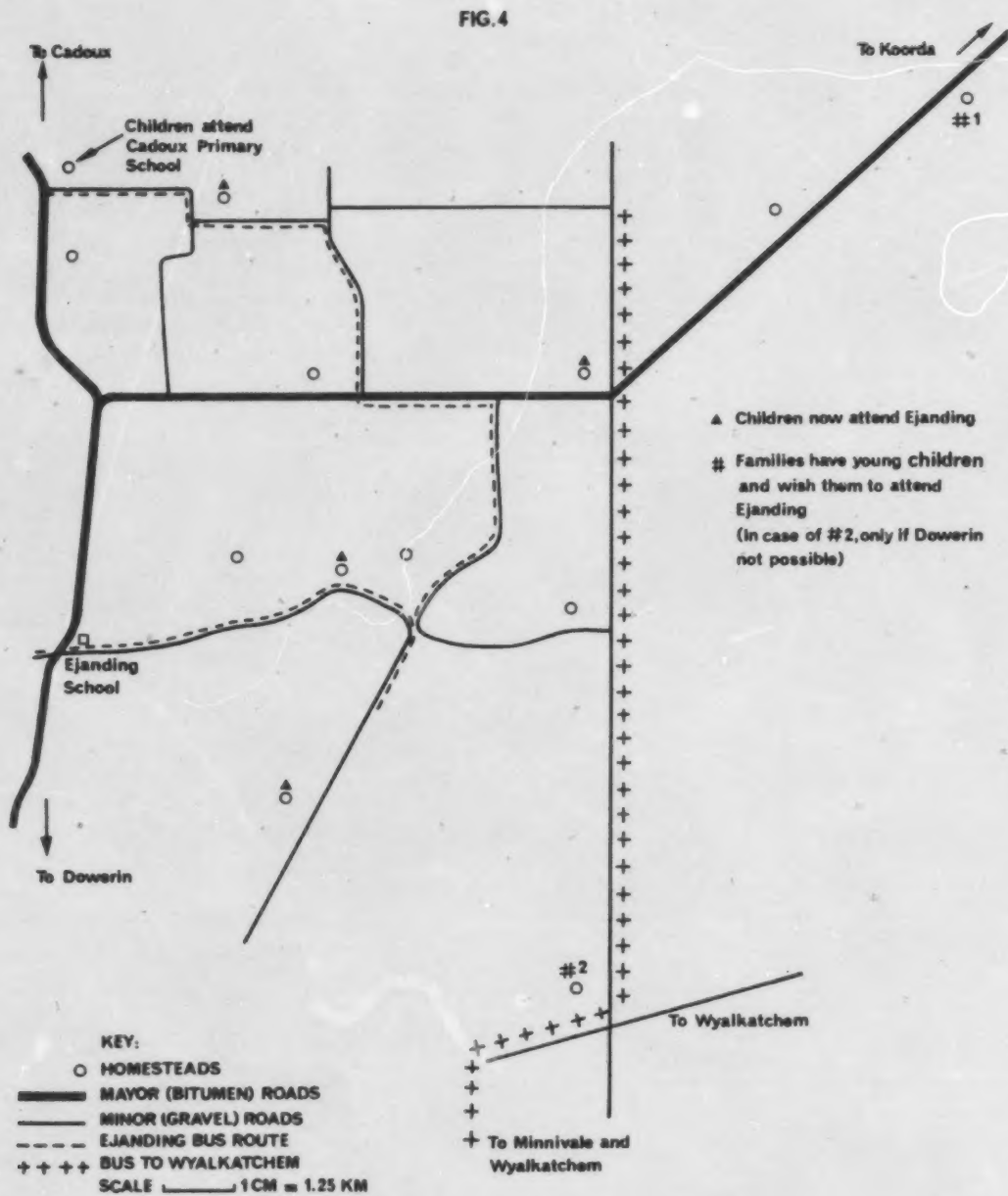
How school bus and boundary policies can have profound effect on community life is illustrated by Figure 4. Both families No. 1 and No. 2 have young children who will begin pre-school in two or three years. Both families regard themselves as members of the Ejanding and Dowerin communities, both having family, sporting and other social contacts in Dowerin. These people wish to maintain this contact with Dowerin by using it as a business, shopping and social centre as much as practicable. However, with the present structure of school bus routes, it is likely that the children may have to attend schools other than Ejanding. If their children were to attend school in centres other than Ejanding or Dowerin then they believe that they could not maintain their contact with Dowerin. Further, their children would grow up in another community. The issue of just where buses should go, the effect the bus routes have on school boundaries, the parameters within which the Bus Committee works, and which schools children attend, need to be looked at in the context of the role a school plays in maintaining a community.

3.2.3 Staffing

From the Ejanding and Dumbelyung community members' point of view, staffing practices should reflect a particular school's community context. For example, the Ejanding community members are quite clear about the qualities their teacher should have.

- (1) The teacher must be able to interact with the local people, by participating in some community activities and being able to communicate effectively with parents, yet maintain some degree of professional distance.
- (2) The teacher must be self-reliant and self-motivated and able to work in isolation from other adults.

Figure 4: Ejanding and bus routes.



- (3) The teacher must be able to maintain discipline but be able to become involved in social situations. The pre-primary and Year 1 students need a "soft touch", and a more rigorous approach is seen as necessary for the Year 6 and 7 students in preparation for high school classrooms,
- (4) The teacher must be sensitive to the nuances of country life and willing to adjust personal behaviour in light of this.
- (5) At a professional level, besides the obvious need to be able to cope with seven grades of students (and pre-primary children), the teacher must have a broad subject competence in the academic areas, with a balanced interest in other areas such as art, sport and so on.
- (6) The teacher should have a good general knowledge. To the children, the teacher is a major contact from outside the district, and is thus a path by which their awareness of the broader community is developed.
- (7) Extra emphasis was placed on the need to 'get along with' children. Tolerance of weaknesses and personalities of children is especially important because of the intimate relationship developed between school members.
- (8) Political, social and religious beliefs of the teacher should not antagonize the community.
- (9) The lack of regular contact with adults and professional associates, and the pressures of administrative and educational duties in the school, suggest that the teacher must have a strong sense of professionalism.

Community members at both Ejanding and Dumbleyung also have strong feelings about staffing policies which effect teacher turnover.

We like the teacher to change every two years or so. The teacher should not stay at the school for too long. Two years is enough. (Ejanding parent)

We would not like all of the staff to stay year after year. It's good for the town that some new people come and go. (Dumbleyung parent)

These statements were endorsed by the teacher at Ejanding. Such comments are rather contentious at the moment. The staffing of isolated schools and schools in small country areas is a policy area which has recently received much attention (Deschamp and Beck, 1979). It is commonly held that the best educational experience is to be had in a school where teaching staff is stable and experienced. Various incentive schemes such as 'regional allowances' and promotional preference have been used in various parts of the world to try to reduce staff turnover and encourage experienced staff to stay at particular schools. Thus, it is somewhat of a surprise to find a community which believes that a relatively high teacher turnover is desirable. The community realizes that the teachers have strengths and weaknesses, and that they have different methods and interests. Consequently, they believe that the change experienced by children in curriculum areas (e.g., Teacher A might be good at art, Teacher B at music) and teaching methods is an excellent foil to the isolation of the school. The teacher agrees with this, and furthermore, points out that a teacher can come to 'know the children too well'. Teacher expectations of children can become channelled. Similarly, if a child-teacher relationship is strained, it is likely to have a strong influence on that child if contact extends over many years and in all aspects of the school curriculum.

At Dumbleyung, there is less specification by community members of the professional characteristics required. Broad specifications are given, such as being able to maintain firm discipline, being a 'good' teacher, and being able to understand children. However, it is generally believed that teachers do a good job at teaching, and that the Education Department and the Principal work to ensure this. There is lively criticism of 'dud' teachers. However, the teachers in a school are looked upon as a team, and it is the staff profile which is most important.

We've got a good mixture of teachers at the moment. Not too many inexperienced teachers. The Principal and the Deputy are experienced. We've got motherly types for the young kids and disciplinarians for some of the older children.

Dumbleyung community members, although by no means underplaying the professional aspect of teaching, are also very interested in the non-professional side of teachers. They prefer teachers to be young - perhaps marriageable, if female, and good sportsmen if male. Teachers are expected to have a sociable, community spirited outlook. They must be approachable and friendly.

It's important that teachers help the good relationships between teachers, parents and kids. They have to be community minded. (A parent)

At Dumbleyung the incumbents of the position of principal and deputy principal need to have special characteristics. These are high profile positions, and ones which, from the community's point of view, set the tenor of the school. Thus, there is a considerable public relations aspect to the promotional positions in the school. Parents and community officials feel that they must have ready access to, and get sympathetic treatment from, these staff members. They feel that the promotional staff must work for the school and its community. Willingness to discuss school issues and to confer with community members about school decisions are valued, whether through the Principal's reports at Parents and Citizens' meetings, at chance meetings in the street, or over a drink at the Club.

If we've got any problems I feel that I can tell him (the Principal). He has the staff working harmoniously.

If there's anything serious about ... (my daughter) I go to see ... (the Deputy). He cares about the kids and the staff work together on these things.

... (the Principal) does what's best for the community. Last year he got our opinion about what type of resource centre to have.

People like to know what's going on. A degree of community leadership is sought - it is expected that the Principal will be a valuable addition to the community's fund of civic-minded, responsible citizens.

3.3 Combating isolation and smallness

Certainly the problems of professional isolation for the lone Eijanding teacher, 25 kilometres from the nearest school and with responsibility for the education of 24 children over a nine-year age range, are significant. There are less dramatic but no less important needs of a teacher within the small Dumbleyung District High School, despite the presence of colleagues and promotional staff. The fact remains that this small unit is many miles away from support services and facilities.

The most pressing problems associated with this isolation, from the point of view of school staff and community members, are considered below. Some have been overcome by local school initiative; others are met by Education Department provision; and others remain as yet unsolved.

3.3.1 Teacher induction

It was with much trepidation that the Ejanding teacher learned of his appointment to a rural one-teacher school after only one year's experience teaching a single-grade class in a large metropolitan school. Despite his obvious competence and willingness, it took a whole term for him to come to grips with the task of administering the school.

I knew almost nothing about Class IV schools when I was first appointed, and we received no induction to working in a Class IV school at all so that we were totally out on our own when we started.
(The teacher)

The teacher arrived at the school armed only with information regarding the location of the school house front door key. From that time on, many people were instrumental in assisting him to adjust to his role of teacher and Ejanding community member.

At his request the staff at nearby Dowerin school were able to advise on administrative matters such as bus regulations, and other details which confront newly instated teachers. Helpful notes left by the previous understanding teacher included information regarding school funds, gardens, the school bus, the arrangements for Friday afternoon sport and the mathematics progress of the students. Brief contact with the previous teacher was also valuable in giving hints on handling pre-primary students. These were supplemented by an in-service programme within the first four weeks of the term. In addition to these activities, from informal contacts with the community, and P & C meetings, he learned of the school traditions and patterns of activities they expected in both academic and other areas of administration and process in the school.

In Dumbleyung, the problem of induction of new staff is far less acute, especially in relation to school administration and activity, since it is unlikely that the whole staff would leave at once. On the other hand, the community life at Dumbleyung is complex and the drawing of staff members into it is no small matter. It is in this latter context that the community's role in induction of new staff, particularly principals, is most significant.

This important aspect of induction, which includes events such as the civic reception accorded newly arrived principals and staff, concentrates on introducing the new arrival to the patterns of social life and to the community's formal expectations of the school. Informal visits by community members serve not only as a means of monitoring new staff members but also of making them feel they belong and helping them fit in, i.e. inducting them into the Dumbleyung community.

Thus, especially in the case of the one-teacher school, important induction procedures depend largely on the initiative and good-will of the individuals concerned. The important role of the community in this regard, in both school matters and in the broader community context, cannot be overlooked. It is clear that, from the community's point of view, induction into the community is as important as the induction into the intricacies of running, and working in, a school.

3.3.2 Teacher development

The present teacher was appointed to Ejanding in his second year of teaching. He had no special training to handle either the teaching or administrative demands made on the teacher in a small country school. He also had little experience with pre-school or junior primary children. Similarly, several teachers at Dumbleyung were newly graduated from training colleges when appointed to the school. Especially in the secondary school, some of these newly graduated teachers had sole responsibility for the teaching of a core curriculum subject to the whole of the secondary school. Teachers were not trained for the general nature of duties required at this small district high school. In contrast to the specialist orientation adopted by training institutions and larger schools, the responsibilities assumed by a teacher at Dumbleyung are diverse and include many administrative and maintenance functions which are often assumed by senior staff members or maintenance staff in larger schools.

This is not to say either that there is dissatisfaction with the performance of teachers, or that there are no avenues through which support can be forthcoming. However, both schools are small and geographically isolated, and thus have limited resources on which to call for immediate assistance. The lack of immediate access to professional contact and support is a disadvantage to both the school and the individual staff members at the school. Nevertheless, there are both Departmental policies and de facto practices which have been developed by people associated with the schools to alleviate such teacher development problems.

(1) Regional office

The regional office has been of great assistance to the teacher of Ejanding school. Perhaps the most striking example of this support is that provided in administrative matters by the regional education officer. The existence of the education officer, acting as a kind of administrative advisory teacher, particularly suits the situation. Another activity invaluable for the teacher was the Principal's Conference, held once a term, to which teachers in Class IV schools can go. It was a valuable opportunity for the teachers to discuss problems and solutions with others in the same situation and with others who have administrative experience. The moral support gained at such meetings must not be underestimated. The teacher also commented upon the invaluable help provided by the early childhood advisory staff. This is implicit support of the policy of providing advisory staff in this area.

At Dumbleyung, in-service activities have been organized under the auspices of the Regional Development Committees. The programme has included in-service activities relating to art education, library service workshops, and pre-school in-service. From the point of view of staff members at the school, there are two major advantages of this programme. Firstly it is close, activities having been conducted at either Dumbleyung itself, or in nearby towns. Secondly, it is relevant to their own particular needs - that is, it can be used to supplement the particular skills and expertise which happen to be in the school or the area at the time.

(2) Liaison with nearby schools

An informal and highly valuable liaison has grown between Dowerin District High School and Ejanding. This is a many-faceted relationship. For example, the teacher at Ejanding has been able to seek help with administrative matters from the Principal at Dowerin, discuss teaching methods with the Primary Deputy Principal and other teachers, and attend in-service courses on the new mathematics syllabus in conjunction with Dowerin staff. A further example of the value of such liaison is the occasion when the teacher at Ejanding wished to attend a conference even though a relief teacher was not available. Instead of closing the school, the children were integrated in the various classes at Dowerin for the day. Not only did this enable the teacher-in-charge to attend the conference but it also provided the Ejanding students with experience of a larger school.

Similar valuable contacts are made by Dumbleyung staff with staff of other schools. For example, a Dumbleyung teacher was able to arrange regular visits to a nearby large school. The experience gained with teaching the larger classes was of value from a professional development point of view.

Dumbleyung School takes some responsibility in assisting smaller surrounding schools. From time to time staff of these schools meet to take part in in-service activities planned by Dumbleyung staff. The relatively greater flexibility in time available to promotional staff at the District High School enables them to organize these activities more easily than would be possible for staff of smaller schools.

(3) Experienced promotional staff in the school

At Dumbleyung, the advisory services of the region and from Perth are appreciated greatly, and many of the staff members would like to see the expansion of this service. However, perhaps the most commonly used source of professional support is the experienced administrative staff within the school itself. The Dumbleyung principal and deputy principal have both had wide teaching and support experience, and their expertise and experience are useful adjuncts to the smooth running of the school.

I worry that we are not up to date and can't keep up in a small school. It's good to be able to talk about it (with the deputy) especially in maths. (A teacher)

3.3.3 Catering for student diversity

In large schools, children with special characteristics are often grouped together so that teaching can be tailored to suit them. In the small school, this homogeneous grouping is not usually possible because the child with these special characteristics is likely to be the only such person in the school, or even in the region. The classroom teacher must therefore devote considerably extra time, in a schedule already full, to tailoring a programme to meet the special needs of this particular child. In the two schools being examined, parents or staff identified several such groups of children - gifted children, children with particular learning problems, and Aboriginal children. Problems associated with these groups include the following:

- There are so few of these children. The resources available are limited when there are few children involved.

We have three Aboriginal children at the school. They have the ability, but when they get older they develop an attitudinal problem. We don't use (the services of) Aboriginal Education Branch because we have so few Aboriginal students. (A teacher)

- The personal development of these children tends to suffer because they are more obviously different from other children.

In a big school there is always someone for the child with learning difficulties or some other distinguishing feature to team up with. In a small school they often stick out like sore thumbs. (Educator)

- Problems associated with providing services to the exceptional child are exacerbated by the relative inexperience of some of the teachers.

I haven't taught for long enough yet to know what's normal or usual for these kids. I don't know what to expect. I feel my lack of training in remediation. (A teacher)

- Support and specialist assistance is available to schools from regional guidance officers and visiting advisory teachers and through in-service courses. However, these services are very expensive and access to such facilities is difficult, often necessitating trips by teachers to neighbouring towns or much correspondence being entered into.

At Ejanding and Dumbleyung, different mechanisms have arisen to cope with these problems. At Dumbleyung use has been made in the past of the Chidley Education Centre,¹ of special grouped extension classes in critical thinking for talented children, and of special programmes of monitoring individual childrens' progress. Much of this has been made possible by the time and energies of teams of teachers in the school, co-ordinated by the administrative staff. At Ejanding, where the teacher is on his own, special groups are not possible.

¹ See the third publication in this series - Innovations In Rural Education - which describes the residential and educational facilities of the Centre available to rural students in Western Australia.

An interesting commonality between the two schools is the active interest of community members in these matters. Community members are prepared, and indeed keen, to accept responsibilities in this area. At Ejanding, private lessons have been arranged with a local ex-teacher for a child having reading difficulties. At Dumbleyung, several parents, and not only those whose children are directly involved, attend lectures and follow with interest the activities adopted by the school and the Education Department regarding learning difficulties, or programmes for gifted children.

3.3.4 Rural Integration Programme

Ejanding takes part in the Rural Integration Programme, which provides pre-primary education to children who, because of distance and/or isolation, are unable to attend a pre-primary centre. Besides the eighteen primary children at Ejanding there are three pre-primary children who attend the school for the full day on Mondays and Wednesdays. The provision of the teacher's aide for this scheme has not only made this programme possible at Ejanding but has provided meaningful employment for one of the local young women. This imaginative solution to a problem in providing an educational service is seen by the people at Ejanding as an innovation to be applauded. The teacher and parents regard the programme as advantageous in the development of the pre-school children.

Initially I was worried about the growth of the Rural Integration Programme. I saw pre-primary as better, but have had second thoughts. I've seen some good Rural Integration Programme activities and it can have a good influence on Year 1 and 2 programmes. (Regional educator)

The RIP experience has the additional advantage of reducing the demands Year 1 children make on the teacher's time because they are accustomed to the school environment. This is an important point when the teacher must allocate his time to students working at seven grade levels.

The quality of the support provided by the advisory teacher from the Regional Office, its benefits to both teacher and pre-schooler, and administrative flexibility of the programme, make this project a good example of an adaptation of an educational policy to fit into local circumstances.

3.4 Curriculum

There is a fine line between broadening the scope of the curriculum to ensure relevance to Australian society at large, and losing relevance to the local community. Especially difficult is the adaptation of curriculum aims and methods to suit the wider community when only the local resources are at hand. This chapter describes how these problems are met by staff and parents at Ejanding and Dumbleyung schools. Firstly, the expectations of parents in the two communities and how they influence the curriculum are explored. Next, the special constraints acting upon the lone teacher in the one-teacher school are examined and then the constraints of isolation and smallness are explored. The promise and problems of the K-10 curriculum in the district high school are investigated, as is the difficulty of ensuring curriculum continuity and scope in the small rural school.

3.4.1 Parental expectation

Parental and community expectation has little direct effect on the academic curriculum of either Ejanding School or Dumbleyung School. In this area parents construe their task as supporting the teacher and encouraging the students. They are not overly concerned with the details of course organization or content. They trust the teachers and the Education Department's supervision of teachers (through the work of principals and superintendents) to maintain adequate standards of literacy and numeracy.

Parents are far more likely to take an interest in the non-core parts of the curriculum. These non-core areas are valued by the communities because of three major functions:

- (1) Non-core areas of the curriculum broaden the child's perspective past the home locality. Events which broaden the child's horizons, such as school camps or visits to exhibition centres or facilities outside Dumbleyung or Ejanding are keenly supported. Much favourable comment and helpful assistance is forthcoming regarding such jaunts.
- (2) Non-core areas of the curriculum reflect community attitudes and values. For instance, in both communities, strong support is evident for sporting activity in the schools, reflecting the importance of sport in the communities themselves. The schools' sporting commitments are carefully monitored by parents. Furthermore, parents actively participate in and express opinions on the

schools' sports programmes to a greater extent than is evident in other parts of the curriculum. Similarly, the community attitude of co-operation and participation is a valued feature of the operation of the student 'council' at Dumbleyung.

The aim of the student council is to communicate with the community. They turn to us for help with stalls, or at other fund-raising events. Usually we don't get paid for it. When we did we donated the money to the swimming-pool fund. (A Year 8 student at Dumbleyung)

- (3) In the secondary school, non-core areas of the curriculum show a degree of relevance to the future needs and situation of the child in the community. The need for relevance of curriculum to the community becomes particularly important in the option areas of the curriculum.

They've got much too much fancy equipment in that manual arts centre. In my shed I've got equipment that you can fix anything with but I haven't got what they've got. Kids get spoilt and its not good training. (A farmer)

Lots of businesses use manual typewriters, but a lot don't. We should have some electric at the school, otherwise kids can't use them when they go to get jobs. (A teacher at the school)

Thus, a 'basic' academically oriented education which provides a passport for a student to the wider community is seen as the teacher's responsibility. Experiences of the wider community are also highly regarded in their own right. An education reflecting community attitudes is also sought, and the community take a greater responsibility in this aspect.

3.4.2 Curriculum materials for the one-teacher school

At Ejanding School the curriculum is strongly influenced by Departmental expectations. In addition to direct and "grapevine" accounts as to what the District Superintendent looks for, the teacher has a large collection of syllabuses, teachers' guides, student texts and the like. These are usually identical to those provided for large metropolitan schools.

The Ejanding teacher's very busyness often necessitates students marking their own work, helping one another, and trying to work things out for themselves. The teacher has to observe the students' work individually, diagnose sources of error, undertake remedial teaching and mid-lesson marking. There is a danger that errors can be practised before being identified.

It's time in the classroom that is difficult to arrange in a Class IV school. A lot of the Curriculum Branch material like the social studies and science texts rely on a fair measure of teacher direction. This is just not possible to arrange in a Class IV school. We need material that directs students to particular activities, and that arranges the correction of the activities. The curriculum materials I find most useful are the SRA boxes; they allow individual work and are self-marking and recording. I like the Readers' Digest and the Endeavour series. Their exercises are useful. I like parts of the maths books where the instructions are detailed enough for the students to follow for themselves. I also find the Patterns books useful. What I look for is the detail of the instructions given, whether it is colourful, whether the written instructions are suitable for the level of student that I wish to use it with, and whether they are suitable for distribution amongst different ability levels within the group.
(The Ejanding teacher)

Thus to facilitate the operation of his teaching approach, the teacher at Ejanding looks for material that requires little teacher direction. This need was recognized by one of the regional advisory teachers, who said:

The best help that advisory teachers can give to teachers in small schools is to offer alternatives in organisation of school work. For example, the Reading 360 programme is a very useful alternative to unit progress.

The curriculum is dominated by areas which can easily accommodate constraints placed on the teacher by his situation. Therefore, mathematics, formal English and spelling exercises are used readily. Individual research in social studies is popular. Activities in mathematics and science can be easily accommodated only if there are suitable student-directing workcards. Areas like physical education, music, health and drama, which are likely to depend heavily upon the teacher, will probably receive treatment in proportion to the teacher's enthusiasm for them. Other areas like art and creative writing, during which students can work independently for periods, are used by the teacher to occupy some students while he works with others.

At Ejanding, this results in a curriculum not dissimilar to parental expectations. Students receive plenty of practice in core areas, there is lots of artwork and stories to display, and students learn to take responsibility for their own action.

3.4.3 Combating isolation and smallness

Both Ejanding and Dumbleyung are relatively small and isolated. This situation puts some restraints on curriculum undertakings and outcomes. For example, competitive, team-oriented activity is limited, opportunities for children may be shy in larger groups, and the practice of social interaction skills may be restricted.

There is much enthusiasm in the community for measures which have been adopted to address these problems.

(1) Liaison with other schools or communities. The sporting and competitive links which Ejanding and Dumbleyung schools have with other nearby schools are advantageous for a number of reasons:

- They allow the student to have contact with larger numbers of children of their own age.
- They provide the opportunity for involvement in team and competitive sports.
- The many social activities for children provided in the township of Dowerin, such as scouts and guides and junior sporting teams, are arranged for Friday afternoon. By having school sports in Dowerin on Friday afternoon it is convenient for the Ejanding children to participate in these activities after school.
- Competing as a group against other schools is also considered to be a means of developing community identity in the children.

(2) Travel to distant centres.

School camps and visits to larger centres are highly regarded and strongly supported features of the curriculum both at Ejanding and Dumbleyung.

It (the visit to the south-west school) was social studies in action. The students saw coal-mining, forests and a whole lot of other things that they would never have seen from here and saw them first hand. But it was also a lot of other things - it's a realization that the world is a lot bigger than

they normally think and it's a socializing process of seeing people from another community. It's the same with the Dowerin sports arrangements by which we go to Dowerin each week for sport. It's a definite part of the planned curriculum. I think that the students need these sorts of contacts in order to widen their mental horizons. (The Ejanding teacher)

Despite the strong support received from parents regarding these practices there is one major problem which is felt in both schools. Whether they involve liaison with other schools, or travel to other centres, a high travel cost is involved. In both schools, the P & C and the school attempt to alleviate the financial stresses on individual families (especially those who are financially strained or have more than one child) by some sort of central fund.

3.4.4 K-10 curriculum integration

In the eyes of both educators and community members, one of the highlights of the Dumbleyung School is the organizational pattern of having children from Year 1 to Year 10 on the same campus.

Despite this favourable endorsement of the K-10 concept, in practice, its embrace is somewhat limited. The pre-primary centre and kindergarten is completely separate from the school for all practical purposes: it is geographically separate; it has an enthusiastic but separate parents' group and staff do not regularly interact with primary and secondary staff. Although many of the administrative details of the pre-primary centre are handled by the administrative staff of the school, the day-to-day running and planning of curriculum activities is quite independent.

The primary and secondary sections are staffed separately (except for the Principal) and operate as distinct entities administratively in many areas. Traditions of class organization and timetables in the secondary school operate on the model of subject specialization with eight-period days, whereas primary class teachers are generalists and students have less structured timetables. Supervision of schools is vested in superintendents, who have predominantly either a primary or secondary emphasis. Inter-school sport is arranged with neighbouring secondary schools or primary schools, usually in secondary or primary groups, although primary students are usually enlisted to make up secondary-level teams.

Some reasons for this situation are easily identified. There is little evidence of departmental or system-level administrative or support mechanisms which reflect the K-10 ethos. Indeed there are many examples of factors which teachers see as 'impediments' to be overcome by school staff before a K-10 concept could operate.

Training-college staff need to be aware of district high schools. Training is different for primary and secondary teachers and this produces a block in interaction in the school. (A teacher)

Assessment demands in the secondary school mean that teachers emphasize product. In the primary school, with no external assessment, the emphasis is on process. (A teacher)

Curriculum support from the Education Department is minimal in terms of providing a K-10 curriculum. Primary¹ is primary, secondary is secondary! Social studies¹ will be a good test case. (A teacher)

At the moment, any K-10 curriculum has to originate from the school itself. If teachers are disinterested or inexperienced, it is not feasible to ask them to develop a K-10 curriculum. (A teacher)

Departmental administrative returns are all in terms of primary or secondary - not school. (A teacher)

Staff turnover is also a factor which impedes the planning of a school-based K-10 programme. The careful and painstaking planning by one staff may be to no avail if incoming new staff do not favour the programme. A further, more subtle influence on K-10 planning relates to staffing and promotion. Some staff in district high schools believe that they are looked upon as poor relations. They believe that it is more prestigious to be part of the staff of a large primary or secondary school. There is little incentive for staff to make a career in the district high school, nor to develop skills which match its characteristic structure.

Thus, teacher training traditions, administrative details, assessment requirements, time constraints, staff transfer and teachers' inexperience tend to counteract the philosophical commitment to the K-10 curriculum.

¹ There is currently a new K-10 syllabus being introduced into Western Australian Government schools.

Despite these constraints, there are areas where the staff at Dumbleyung have integrated primary and secondary sections of the school. For example:

- The principal's policy is of 'maximum cross-fertilization' of ideas between primary and secondary areas of the school. He wants the school to be regarded as a whole, and is careful to avoid the dominance of one part of the school by the other. He encourages the outlook that the school is one school and the staff is one staff. He is supported in this attitude by his staff and the community.

- There is no differentiation in primary and secondary teachers' duties in areas such as playground duty and bus duty. Teachers adopt responsibility for each child, no matter whether he or she is from the primary or secondary part of the school. In non-core curriculum - i.e. sport, socials, assemblies, playtimes, speech nights - the school is not organized on a primary-secondary dichotomy. Footballers for the football team are drawn from Years 6 to 10. Social events include children from Years 7 to 10.

- Although from an administrative point of view school resources are usually allocated specifically to one segment of the school, in practice, the use of resources is more liberal. All students have the use of the new primary resource centre. Students in Years 1 and 2 have baked rock cakes in the home economics centre and Year 7 students have used the manual arts centre.

- Despite appointment to specifically primary or secondary parts of the school, some flexibility between primary and secondary teaching duties has been attained. The Year 10 health education teacher is also the Year 6/7 teacher; teachers of physical education and home economics teach both primary and secondary students.

- The use by primary and secondary teachers of the single staffroom, plus the integrated social life the teachers lead, is also significant. Teachers tend to have frequent, informal contact with each other, and this promotes an assimilated and harmonious working environment. Secondary teachers can easily communicate with primary teachers regarding students' past work; arrangements for sports events can be made; and discussion of curricula can proceed without the need for formal structures.

● Teachers at Dumbleyung have been engaged in planning the curriculum from the K-10 point of view. Significantly, most has been done in the social studies area, where initiatives have been taken by the Curriculum Branch of the Education Department.

It is clear that the district high school structure provides opportunities for the implementation of the K-10 structure, despite the impediments which tend to counter such attempts.

3.4.5 Curriculum continuity and scope

Teacher turnover tends to be regular at Ejanding. Although this is seen as desirable in the one-teacher school, maintaining continuity of curriculum in the school is difficult. Another related issue is the direct relationship between the scope of the curriculum and the strengths and abilities of the particular teacher. It is unlikely that any one teacher will have skills in all areas as diverse as art, sewing, manual arts, music, science, sport and so on. Consequently, the children's curriculum may be of limited scope. To a lesser extent, the small staff at Dumbleyung faces this same problem.

Where these problems have been redressed, it has mainly been through community participation in the schools. For example, at Ejanding it is the community members who contribute to the scope of student experiences by organizing and arranging the sports at Dowerin and Cadoux. The parents encourage and help organize the presentation of the Annual Christmas Concert, at which each child in the school has a part in a performance.

The concert is definitely part of the school tradition. The parents would be quite upset if it didn't happen. But it is also educational; they learn a lot from the concert and enjoy it very much too. They are involved in painting scenery, preparing items, practising speaking. There is a lot in it really. (The teacher)

At both Ejanding and Dumbleyung, specialist teachers are drawn from the community. Music teachers at the two schools, sewing teachers at Ejanding, and art and craft teachers at Dumbleyung all come from the community. At Dumbleyung, helpers and the pre-primary aides are community members.

At Dumbleyung, a different aspect of continuity of curriculum was an issue for itinerant members of the community. Their concern is for continuity between schools. A community like Dumbleyung has a high proportion of temporary residents - teachers, police, medical staff, bank staff and so on. To these people it is of concern that continuity of their children's education is lost as they transfer from town to town.

4.0 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

It is intended in this chapter to examine some of the issues discussed in current literature on rural education in the light of findings described in the previous two chapters. This chapter therefore includes:

- (1) An overview of major findings.
- (2) A discussion of the concept of 'rural disadvantage' in education.
- (3) A teasing out of the consequences of the important part a school has to play in the community.
- (4) An examination of the issue of community participation in the school.
- (5) An examination of the balance between local and broader orientation of the school processes and products.

In each of these discussions, the implications for education authorities are examined. It should be noted that the views expressed in this chapter are the views of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the Education Department of Western Australia.

3.1 An overview of findings

The previous two chapters have provided considerable detail regarding two schools and their relationship with their communities. Key findings which have emerged are:

- Ejanding and Dumbleyung communities, although both set in the wheatbelt area of Western Australia, are quite different communities in many significant ways. There are subtle differences in the complexity and nature of demographic, economic and social features. The differences contrast with similarities associated with their common wheat- and sheep-farming base, their isolation, smallness and strong sense of community feeling.
- Both schools are important community institutions. At Ejanding the school is one of few community institutions. Its importance to the community lies not only in providing pre-primary and primary education to the children but also in being a focus for community identity, being a significant socializing agent, developing in children feelings of belonging and feelings of allegiance to the community, and being a

significant cog in the wheel of economic activity and district structure. At Dumbleyung the school offers education from pre-school to Year 10. The expectations of the educational role of the school are more complex, basically because of the varying demands on secondary education made by different people in the community. The school's role in non-educational aspects of the community is also complicated. Like any other Dumbleyung community structure, the school has tasks related to sponsoring community social and recreational well-being. Unlike other community structures, however, the school has wide-ranging contact with different community groups, it constitutes a significant source of facilities and funds for community resources, and the teachers contribute significantly to community vitality. Owing to these special features, the school assumes a prominent role in community's communication patterns and is a strong integrating agent in the community.

- There is considerable community support for both schools. The community plays an extensive part in each school and takes some responsibility for it. There are differences between the two schools in this respect. Dumbleyung school is a larger, more complex institution with a greater range of resources, both human and otherwise, provided by the Education Department. The community plays a less extensive and less pervasive part in the school. Both individuals and community groups do, however, provide significant expertise, facilities and resources to the school at Dumbleyung. Ejanding community members in many ways own and run their school. They provide assets and services to the school, give administrative guidance, give assistance with curriculum continuity and scope, and provide motivational support for the teacher.
- Within both cases studied, it was clear that both the school and its community rely on each other for their health and well-being.
- Major strengths of both schools arise from their smallness, their close community contact, their good facilities and their competent staff. Conversely, major disadvantages arise from that same smallness, and isolation. Especially in the secondary school, there is little opportunity for students to interact and compete with many children their own age.
- In some Education Department policies there may be scope for increased sensitivity to non-educational functions of each school. Staffing, bussing and school-closure policies are examples of policies which have a profound effect on aspects of community life at Dumbleyung and Ejanding.

- Schools which have falling numbers need active support and encouragement. Without this, confidence in them may ebb and their decline will be hastened.
- In each school, practices have evolved which assist in establishing harmony between school provision and community needs. For example, induction of newly appointed staff into the community life, the community-relations functions of the senior staff in schools and the constant contact of school and community are important in assuring that the school and community work in harmony.
- Each school, by utilizing valuable resources such as experienced staff, regional office funds and administrative structures, co-operative efforts between nearby schools, and community expertise and assistance, has overcome to some extent the problems which isolation and smallness present for teacher induction, teacher development, specialist teaching needs and curriculum.
- Areas of Education Department policy where flexibility allows the school to adopt procedures suited to particular demographic or social needs of the community are highly regarded. The Rural Integration Programme, regional teacher development schemes, regional advisory staff, teacher-sharing schemes and school-based curriculum development are examples of these policies.
- A particular problem in both schools concerns making suitable provision for the small numbers of exceptional children. This is a problem particularly because there are such small numbers of such children. In both schools, although interesting procedures have been adopted to cope with this to some extent, it remains a troublesome area.
- In school curriculum there is a fine line separating parochialism and local relevance. In each school, a number of strategies are adopted to help broaden the school curriculum beyond the immediate community horizons. These strategies include trips, camps and interaction between schools. A broad perspective is very important, especially at secondary school.
- Adequate local relevance of the curriculum is achieved by various types of links between the school and the community, particularly in non-core areas, where there is most scope for reflecting community values and attitudes.

- The one-teacher school has special problems of shortage of teacher time and inappropriateness of curriculum materials for the special circumstances of the multi-grade class. Examples of characteristics which curriculum materials might have and strategies which might usefully be used by teachers in this situation were outlined.
- The district high school does not meet the educational or social needs of all the youngsters in the community. Whether it could or not, by effecting organizational styles allowing a wider range of options, curriculum experience of the wider community, social interaction opportunities and adequate transition to large secondary schools, is a question which deserves further research.
- The district high school has many advantages accruing from its K-10 organization. The exploitation of these advantages is sometimes constrained by teacher training practices and the ways in which support structures are organized and administered. Examples were given of ways these constraints have been minimized.
- Curriculum continuity, in view of teacher turnover, is problematic, especially in the small one-teacher school. The use of community resources at Ejanding is an interesting, inexpensive and educationally sound method which has evolved to deal with these problems.
- Curriculum continuity for children of transient workers (such as bank and school staffs) as their children change schools is one factor in the decision of such people not to send their children to the local school.
- The costs to the taxpayer of maintaining the small schools in the light of declining enrolments was a concern of community members.
- The most forceful arguments for the survival of the two schools as they presently exist are set, not in the context of educational issues, but in terms of the non-educational role that the schools play in their communities.

4.2 Rural disadvantage

There is a belief that rural children, by virtue of their rurality, are somehow educationally disadvantaged. For example, in a summary of the Schools Commission report for the 1976-1978 triennium it was stated that 'country children require improved educational services if they are to have the same life chances as children in large towns and cities' (1975, p.5). Similarly, in the report on poverty and

education in Australia, the Australian Government Commission of Inquiry into Poverty pointed out a number of factors which contribute to the understanding that rural areas were disadvantaged with respect to education (1976, p.62). Additionally, in its Report on the Education of Isolated School Children, the Senate Standing Committee on Education and the Arts concluded that problems relating to the education of children in isolated areas of Australia were serious, diverse and widespread (1976, p.46).

Amongst the many factors which have been associated with this rural disadvantage are the geographic isolation of rural children, their need to travel long distances to go to school, their experience with multi-grade classes rather than single grade or homogeneous age or ability classes, their lack of access to full secondary or post-secondary education facilities, and their lack of contact with specialist teachers and staff such as vocational guidance and option teachers. The time and cost required to enable students to travel to urban areas for cultural experiences beyond the scope of rural communities are cited as further factors in rural disadvantage, along with difficulties of access for rural teachers to in-service and teacher development facilities. The smallness of classes provides fewer opportunities for stimulating discussion, subject choice and school resource utilization. It has been claimed that, in many of the measures of educational outcome, rural children do less well than their urban counterparts (Weston, 1977, p.24). It is these arguments and observations which are used as evidence of a distinct rural disadvantage in education.

However, current reassessment of rural education has produced a re-thinking of the concept of rural educational disadvantage. For example, in examining the list of factors which contribute to rural disadvantage, it is unclear if they are all really disadvantages, or whether some are merely indications of how different rural areas are from urban areas. For instance, is education in composite classes necessarily less desirable than education in single group classes? Do small classes limit educational development? Is the rural environment necessarily any less socially and culturally stimulating than the urban environment? Are larger consolidated schools better than smaller schools?

Some recent research evidence suggests that there are significant advantages and strengths in the type of arrangements often found in rural schools, i.e. small classes, small schools, multi-grade classes and so on. For example, in a study done in 1964 on the effects of school size, Barker and Gump found that small schools are characterized by features such as greater student involvement in activities, greater student personal

satisfaction greater involvement of students in relationships with peers. They, along with other researchers who have examined the size of institutions, have led to the development of convincing arguments suggesting that the individual in a small institution may be better off in many ways. The individual is far less likely to be lost, degraded, ignored, unproductive, a follower rather than a leader, uninvolved and so on (Baldridge, 1972; Campbell et al 1979; Stepanovich, 1971; Bidwell, 1975; Palmer, 1978).

Further advantages of rural school organizational patterns include the high degree of individualized attention received in a small school; the cohesiveness of students, parents, teachers and community; the ease of implementation of innovations; and the absence of student discipline problems (Warren, 1977, p.5). The advantages of vertical grouping and the greater degree of continuity provided in the education of children are being cited.

Although both Ejanding and Dumbleyung are amongst the smallest schools of their type in the State they are by no means amongst the most isolated. Nor are the families they serve obviously 'disadvantaged' by virtue of many other educationally significant characteristics. Nevertheless the schools show many characteristics such as geographic and cultural isolation, small size, and many features of educational organization which could lead to their being classified as educationally disadvantaged. However, the teachers and community members associated with Ejanding School and with the primary part of Dumbleyung School do not consider the children to be disadvantaged. Furthermore, many community members, especially at Ejanding, regard bigger schools in more populous areas as lacking the many advantageous features of their schools. Certainly, they don't underestimate the problems associated with distance and isolation but in many ways they regard the difficulties which arise from isolation and smallness as the costs they are prepared to pay for the many benefits of from having their distinctive local school.

Although these rural schools may be different from one's idea of a 'normal' school, beliefs that they are disadvantaged with respect to 'normal' schools must be treated with some suspicion. Some costs are different, some benefits are different, the problems are different, but in the eyes of the communities they serve, the net effect is not inferior.

To a lesser extent, the same could be said about the secondary section of Dumbleyung School. However, community members and educators have the 'ideal' of a large, urban-style high school wistfully in mind when they examine Dumbleyung. To a certain extent, the blueprint for the secondary school is the organizational and staffing patterns of large high schools. It is consequently not surprising that this feeling - that ideal schools are similar to larger schools - should be apparent.

However, where there are significantly positive aspects of the Dumbleyung secondary school, it is not necessarily where the school organization approaches the 'ideal'. The K-10 curriculum concept is far more easily attained in a K-10 school. Staff co-operation, individualized attention and close contact with the community are all specially appropriate to the small school organized along the lines of a district high school. Thus, although it is true to say that community members and educators believe that the small rural secondary school has deficiencies relative to the larger school, it is not necessarily the differences between the two which are the weaknesses, nor the similarities which are the strengths.

The Ejanding and Dumbleyung cases therefore provide a measure of support for the 'different, not disadvantaged' perception of these schools. They suggest that it may be inappropriate to judge schools on structural features such as size, location and so on. The study of Ejanding and Dumbleyung schools illustrate examples of policies and practices which have been developed, either locally or by the Education Department, which capitalize on the strengths of the schools and attenuate any weaknesses. Experience at these schools also suggests that a closer look is needed at the organizational support and structure of such schools. These studies show that both educators and community members can profitably capitalize on their own strengths, and adapt the educational process to their own characteristics.

4.3 The role of the school in the community

In the present economic climate, topical issues include the survival of shrinking country towns, the development of mushrooming new towns, and regional and rural development. The school's impact on these matters is becoming of greater interest to governments, community members and educators. Education authorities and governments are reassessing their responsibilities for the school's role in these matters. (Angus, Dunnell and Brown, 1980)

In this context the examination of Ejanding and Dumbleyung schools' non-educational responsibilities in their communities highlight several points worthy of discussion:

- (1) Both educators and community members accept that Dumbleyung and Ejanding schools, because of high capital costs or low student-teacher ratios, are expensive to operate. They suspect that, in the near future, this cost will become a major issue, perhaps threatening the existence of their schools and therefore of their communities. If the cost effectiveness of these schools is examined, they hope that education authorities will not look upon schools as providing just an educational service to school-age children in a community. Educational decisions, such as those to open or close schools, will have important effects on the economic and social structure of the community and therefore deserve consideration by educational policy makers from this point of view.
- (2) Costs per pupil are no doubt a significant unit of analysis in the determination of educational policy. The observation in the 1960 Education Circular that the largest primary schools have an annual cost of £50 13s.10d. per head, compared to £73 15s.3d. in the smallest schools may have been a significant one in the light of the rapid closing of small schools at the time. However, the costs and benefits of educational policies and practices on social and economic features of community life are difficult to gauge, especially in dollar equivalents. The social and personal benefits of parents having a choice of sending secondary students away to school or of keeping them at home in a family and community environment cannot be measured in financial terms. The contribution to economic optimism which a school can engender cannot be measured.

Consideration of educational policy from the viewpoint of a school's contribution to the social and economic well-being of community members may be difficult unless the contribution is clearly articulated from a policy point of view. This suggests that efforts should be made to clarify the schools' roles in communities like Dumbleyung and Ejanding so that the schools' responsibilities in these aspects can be determined.

- (3) If education authorities are to act on the understanding that schools have wide roles in community development, they are likely to be faced with development dilemmas. For instance, in terms of community development, the people at Ejanding, as members of the Dowerin community, may have to make unenviable choices. If they support their local

school, they may be threatening the viability of the district high school at Dowerin, their district centre. These competing demands will become pressing as populations dwindle. It is likely that the educational decision-making will have to face the problem of reconciling the competing needs of these communities for schools and hence community survival. This will be difficult to do in an informed manner unless there is a clear understanding of the costs and benefits associated with each decision.

- (4) It is unlikely that educational decisions which effect community development so greatly could be made unilaterally by education authorities. Support, guidance and co-operation may be required at both government and community level regarding development priorities, in which the functions and aims of educational institutions are recognized.
- (5) At Ejanding and Dumbleyung, different practices and policies were important when examining the role of the school in the community. It appears that both the educational and non-educational effects of school policies and practices on communities are likely to differ from community to community. Policies such as those relating to staffing and bussing policies interact with the particular features of a community in unique ways.

This situation presents problems for a centralized decision-making body, since it is difficult to be sensitive to all localized characteristics. The identification of particular practices and policies with significant costs and benefits to families or communities requires local knowledge. Clearly, decision-making processes in the education system require that local conditions can be taken into account.

4.4 Community participation

The call for greater integration of school and community is made frequently in educational literature (Walker, 1974, p.11). In many ways, the school at Ejanding, and to a lesser extent the school at Dumbleyung, epitomize the sort of community involvement being called for. Community involvement in these schools appears to be closely associated with advantageous features of the two schools such as the harmony between home and school life, the support and trust which the community display towards the school, and the usefulness of the community in providing financial and manpower resources for school activities.

Of course, there are many other aspects of the two communities and their schools which contribute to the widespread satisfaction with the schools. The homogeneity and cohesion of the population in respect to values and expectations reduces the risk of conflict between community members and school. The relative affluence of the two communities and their ability to make use of and influence social institutions in our society should also be taken into account. The teachers who were at the schools during this study show a considerable skill and professionalism. The causal links between the excellence of the schools and these factors cannot be unravelled. Nevertheless, the close interweaving of school, home and community is a distinctive and advantageous feature of these schools. Several conclusions can be drawn from the observation of school-community relations in the two schools.

- (1) It may be that such small rural schools would make 'natural laboratories' for community involvement in schools. Closer examination of the dynamics of this involvement might prove worth while. In the past much literature on the subject of school-community relations is devoted to exploring the reasons why there is not a closer relationship. Such reasons include the organizational insularity of teachers, the specialization of the teachers' role, the society wide (rather than community based) orientation of schools, the discouraging atmosphere of schools and the inertial mass of teachers (Henry, 1976). In schools like Dumbleyung and Ejanding, there may be positive lessons to be learned about the values and processes of successful school-community relations.
- (2) The strength and value of the community's links with these two schools are associated with factors such as the smallness, isolation and cohesiveness of the towns themselves. It is disputable whether it would be possible to develop the same valuable links in suburban or more newly established communities. However, even if examination of these links may not provide relevant lessons for all other communities, they at least deserve study so that they can be fully exploited in their own context and so that schools in which they are a feature can build on their own strengths.
- (3) Despite the strength and scope of school-community links, the community members at Ejanding have several apprehensions associated with their effectiveness in the school and their ability to monitor school activities. They feel a lack of effectiveness, in part relating to the lack of information concerning educational activities, and in part in relating to the lack of clear guidelines for participation by which community members can influence those parts of the

school which they consider important. Some Dumbleyung community members were also not sure of the boundaries of their welcome in the school. At Dumbleyung, associated with this uncertainty is a feeling that, given the high level of resources in the school, the community may not be needed as much as it once was.

The utilization of community resources in the schools was most efficient when it had a base which appeared to community members to be both necessary and legitimate in contributing to the school and the community. Consequently, development of clear guidelines and mechanisms by which community members can assume meaningful responsibility within their school is a strategy which appears to be particularly suited to the circumstances of a small rural community. Further, it is likely that, in different communities, the boundaries of this responsibility would differ to suit local conditions and inclinations.

- (4) Studies of both of these schools illustrated the importance of the staff, particularly the senior staff, in fostering and utilizing community resources. A willingness and ability to accept community relations as a considerable component of the teachers' and Principal's duties was evident. This suggests that the skills and methods needed to perform these duties well should be documented and incorporated into staff development and training programmes.

4.5 Relevance versus parochialism

Current literature on rural schools articulates a fear that traditional means of providing educational facilities reflect efforts to adopt methods of organization suited to urban communities. These methods may not meet the needs of rural communities. For instance, practices such as the consolidation of schools, the centralization of administration control, the increased specialization and professionalism of teachers and the emphasis on efficiency, are cited as having contributed to a diminished continuity between rural life and rural education (Sher, 1976, p.12).

On the other hand, it is unclear just how much schools can afford to adapt to their community circumstances. It is unclear as to which aspects of a school should adapt and which should retain the flavour of a broader community so that children from the community are prepared to participate in the broader community life-style if they so desire.

The study of Ejanding and Dumbleyung schools has shown some areas of the school's activities where local relevance is considered to be advantageous. These activities enrich not only the educational process but also the community's identification with the school. For instance, each school uses elements of the particular community's pool of expertise and resources in social studies, sport, and option curriculum areas. Each has adapted particular strategies either unique to the school or in conjunction with other nearby schools for utilizing the in-service and teacher development services of the Education Department. Each has subtly adjusted its curriculum and organization to fit in with community expectation of its non-educational role in the community. The many strategies adopted by each school to broaden the experiences and resources beyond that available in the smaller community are themselves a significant adaption to the smallness and isolation of each school.

However, in each school there is evidence that parents have further unsatisfied concerns regarding the skills and experiences needed for children to operate in the broader society. Ejanding community members are concerned for their children's ability to cope in a large, impersonally organized high school after leaving Ejanding School. Dumbleyung parents are concerned about similar things, and also about the lack of options in the secondary school, and the lack of social interaction available. To learn what it is like to live in a large town or city is an educational experience that most parents want for their children.

It is apparent therefore that rural schools do profit from adaption of organization and some parts of the curriculum to local conditions. However, educational experiences and processes must be firmly rooted in the outside world, to ensure that children have the option of easy transition to the world outside their own little town.

Appendix A

Network methodology

One of the major problems associated with this study was to determine what was meant by 'community'. Another problem which emerged was to determine what type of information concerning school community inter-relationship would be most useful to collect. Both of these problems were solved by the use of network methodology. A deeper exploration of this network theory and how it was used in this project is outlined below.

Rationale for purposes of using network methodology

A network is a theoretical framework used in social science to specify and describe properties of social interconnections between people or groups, in order to explain social behaviour (Mitchell, 1969). In this project, development of such a network of linkages between the school and the community provided a systematic way of defining the Dumbleyung and Ejanding communities and describing the nature and extent of inter-relationship between the school and the community. Thus, the network provided part of the data required to answer the following research questions:

Who is part of each community?

What is the role of the school in the community?

What is the role of the community in the school?

The other major aim of the project was to determine which school policies and practices are particularly suited, or particularly unsuited, to the community. The network framework was also useful in achieving this aim. It provided a channel through which community members could be asked which of the practices and policies of the school are of interest or concern to them, thus identifying the practices and policies which are of greatest significance.

There are usually several components to a completed network:

The anchor point. An anchor point is a person or group whose behaviour the observer wishes to interpret. In these case studies, the central focus is the school.

In the one-teacher Ejanding school, the teacher plans school operations so the teacher is the most appropriate as the anchor.

In the larger school at Dumbleyung different facets of the school activity are organized by different people. The identity of the anchor is therefore less obvious. There are two strategies which can be adopted in situations like this. The network may have anchorage centred on a group of people, or alternatively it is feasible that different aspects of larger schools might be somewhat unrelated. Thus separate networks may be appropriate. These separate networks which relate to part of a social situation are called action sets, and may have different anchors.

Several action sets were evident at Dumbleyung when the school's contact with the community was examined. Thus, although the school was always the focus, the school's community was identified by charting networks from the various people in the school who had most contact with the community in their capacity as school staff. In terms of school-community interaction, the Principal, the Deputy Principal, the pre-primary teacher and the P & C president were significant as anchors.

Points. The points in a network constitute an operational definition of the community. In a sociological sense, these points of a network may be thought of as pinpointing the identity of "significant others", whose influence on the anchor is important in understanding the actions of the anchor.

At both Dumbleyung and Ejanding, points were identified by charting all those people who had frequent or significant interaction with the anchors (i.e. the school). This information was gained from two sources:

- (1) School enrolment lists.
- (2) Interviews with school staff.

Using this definition, the schools' community's included people from families with children at the school; families of ex-students and families with prospective students, as well as other interested persons in the community; and people with community responsibilities. In a similar way, educators from outside the school who have had contact with the school were included as part of the school's community.

In this study, the points were not always individuals. Groups such as P & C, families and organizations were sometimes used as points. This practice differs somewhat from previous studies which use this method. In these studies the concept of networks has been used primarily to explain action through charting personal behaviour and interpersonal links between individuals. The use of groups as anchors or points in the network has typically aroused some criticism.

One such criticism has centred on the fact that a group is an abstraction, derived from a consideration of selected aspects of the total social behaviour of group members. Consequently, links to or from a group will tend to reflect only those selected, group-oriented aspects. Similarly, descriptions of the links connecting groups tend to be on a different level of abstraction from those connecting individuals. Clarity of identity of points is also lost, since different individuals may be members of several groups.

Nevertheless, during this analysis of the network of Ejanding and Dumbleyung communities it was decided that groups, rather than individuals, could constitute units of analysis. Typically, family groups were used, but Parents and Citizens' groups and groups of regional and head office staff were also included.

This strategy was adopted for a number of reasons. Firstly, the aim of the project was to chart the inter-relationships between the community and the school with particular reference to economic, social and demographic features of the area. It became evident that a major characteristic of both communities was the importance of the family unit. Farming families live geographically separate from one another. The economic unit is the family farm. Social and recreational activities are often arranged around family outings. Consequently, the family is a natural unit in studying both Ejanding and Dumbleyung. Similarly, school policy decision-making tends not to be centred on an individual. Rather, Education Department policy and practice and advice from people such as advisory teachers etc., are important. Consequently the 'school' can be meaningfully conceptualized as a series of groups rather than a collection of individuals.

To the extent that groups are used consistently as points in the network the problem of using different levels of abstraction when describing network linkages is avoided. It means, however, that the description of the linkages must be couched in terms appropriate to group inter-relationships, rather than personal characteristics.

Links in the network. 'Links' are the descriptive outlines of the nature of interaction between points and anchor, a knowledge of which provides insight into the phenomenon being studied.

Links between two points in a network can be many stranded, i.e. people may interact with each other at different times using a different framework of expectations. For instance, business associates may act in one way when conducting business but use a different frame of reference when at the tennis club. Therefore, the inter-relationships studied are usually limited to those which relate specifically to the particular behaviour patterns under observations. Thus, in this study, the inter-relationship between a teacher and a shopkeeper would not be charted unless this relationship is significant in explaining attitudes and decisions about the school. It is by selecting those particular links which explain particular behaviour which limits a network from being a global picture of a person's or community's whole life to being a description of only one specific aspect.

The 'dimensions' of the links, or what type of information is collected about them, must be determined next. For instance, information such as the frequency of interaction may be relevant. For this study, it was considered important to describe the assumptions and expectations about education in their school which guide behaviour of person or groups in the networks. Consequently, the information collected from each respondent in an interview included:

- (1) The nature, frequency, motivation and purpose of the respondents' contacts regarding educational matters between the school, school staff and community members, either formally or informally.
- (2) The respondents' perception of the major strengths and weaknesses of the school.

The use of networks as an analytic tool has typically evoked two problems related to linkages. Firstly it has been pointed out (Mitchell, 1969, p.11) that writers using the notion of networks have not provided enough systematically recorded details in their accounts to make it possible to check their interpretations. This deficiency arises partly because of the lack of a set of features which are commonly accepted as being important to the understanding of human behaviour. Articulation of such a set of features would enable researchers to direct their attentions and record systematic information. Secondly, there is no systematic definition of what constitutes an inter-relationship which may be depicted as a link in the network.

In some ways these problems and criticisms can be leveled at this study. However, measures have been taken to minimize such problems. For instance, there was the problem of specifying, a priori, which characteristic of the inter-relationship (links) between community members (points) would be specified. In previous work relating to networks, when describing the relationship of one point to another

a number of characteristics have been considered of interest. These have included dimensions such as the 'reachability' of a person or group, the density of a network, and the range of contact a person has. Morphological characteristics reflect the shape of the networks and provide a descriptive basis for comparative purposes.

In the context of these case studies, the data collection focused on determining the expectations, values and normative behaviours which characterized community-school interaction, i.e. the question to be answered about each specific interaction was why did this interaction occur. By charting the reasons and motivations behind community/school interaction, a clear picture of what the school means to the community and vice versa can be obtained.

Similarly, data was recorded and collected systematically. This data constitutes either notes written during interviews, taped records of interviews reconstructed immediately after each interview from notes taken during the interview, or actual tape recordings of interviews. To enable the reader to check the interpretations of the authors, selected excerpts from these recorded data have been included in the text.

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